

Driving Safely in a Dust Storm

- If possible, avoid the dust storm area.
- Never stop on the traveled portion of the roadway.
 - Pull your vehicle off the pavement as far as possible.
 - Stop, turn off lights, set the emergency brake.
 - Take your foot off of the brake pedal to be sure the tail lights are not illuminated.
- If you cannot pull off the roadway, proceed at a speed suitable for visibility.
 - Turn on lights and sound horn occasionally.
 - Use the painted center line to help guide you.
 - Look for a safe place to pull off the roadway.



Dust storm on Interstate 10, March 2008
Photo by Orlando Fierro, Doña Ana County Flood Commission

For More Information

Please contact the following agencies for more information about protecting your family from natural hazards:

Doña Ana County Local Emergency Planning Committee

www.donaanalepc.org

Office of Emergency Management
www.donaanacounty.org/emergency
(575) 647-7900
1170 North Solano, Suite O
Las Cruces, NM 88001

Doña Ana County Flood Commission
www.donaanacounty.org/flood
(575) 525-5558

Elephant Butte Irrigation District
www.ebid-nm.org
(575) 526-6671

City of Las Cruces Public Works Dept.
(575) 528-3131
www.las-cruces.org/Departments/public%20works.aspx

NM Department of Transportation
Roadway Conditions
<http://www.nmroads.com>
1-800-432-4269

National Weather Service El Paso/Santa Teresa
www.srh.noaa.gov/epz

American Red Cross
Southwest New Mexico Chapter
www.redcrossnewmexico.org

Unless otherwise noted, the information in this brochure has been adapted from NOAA's National Weather Service, the New Mexico Department of Health, and the Doña Ana County Flood Commission.

January 2012



Dust Storms

NATURAL HAZARDS Of Southern New Mexico

Prepared by the Natural Hazards Committee

Dust Storms

A dust storm usually arrives suddenly in the form of an advancing wall of dust and debris which may be miles long and several thousand feet high. This occurs when high winds raise large amounts of dust from areas of dry, loose, exposed soil. They can strike with little warning, reducing visibility and making it difficult to breathe.

Blinding, choking dust also can quickly make driving conditions hazardous, causing accidents that may involve chain collisions. Dust storms usually last only a few minutes, but the actions a motorist takes during the storm may be the most important of his or her life.

Terms Describing Wind Speed and Dust Storms

- **LIGHT** or **LIGHT AND VARIABLE**
0 to 5 mph
- **GENTLE BREEZE** - 5 to 15 mph
- **BREEZY, BRISK, BLUSTERY**
15 to 25 mph
- **WINDY** - 20 to 30 mph
- **VERY WINDY** - 30 to 40 mph
- **STRONG, DANGEROUS, HIGH**
40 mph or greater

- **HIGH WIND WARNING** - Issued for sustained winds of 40 mph or more for 1 hour, or wind gusts 58 mph or greater.
- **BLOWING DUST ADVISORY**
Issued when widespread visibilities are at or below 1 mile but above 1/4 mile due to blowing dust for any extended period of time.
- **DUST STORM (or SAND STORM) WARNING** - Visibility of 1/4 mile or less due to blowing dust or sand, and wind speeds of 30 miles an hour or more.

Health Concerns and Precautions

Dust irritates the lungs and can trigger allergic reactions, as well as asthma attacks. Dust can cause coughing, wheezing, runny noses, and irritated eyes.

Some groups of people, such as infants, pregnant women, and seniors are more sensitive to dust than others. Breathing a lot of dust over a long period of time can cause chronic breathing and lung problems.

The best precaution is simply to avoid going outside during severe dust storms. If you must go out, spend as little time outside as possible. Wearing some type of covering over your nose and mouth can provide some protection from large particles. However, since the small dust particles are the most harmful, staying out of the dust is the best solution.



Dust storm across Las Cruces; Photo by Tobe Turpen, May 2004