

# Massive Sahara dust plume headed for southeastern US, could bring sensational sunsets

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

The southeastern U.S. is getting dusted by the Sahara.

A massive cloud of dust from the sands of the Sahara Desert is headed our way—though its infinitesimally [small particles](#) will do little more than enhance sunsets and pause the tropical storm season, meteorologists say.

By the time it floats down from the atmosphere it will have traveled more than 5,000 miles, CNN meteorologist Haley Brink said. While it sounds dramatic, it's actually pretty normal.

"Large plumes of Saharan Dust routinely track into the Atlantic Ocean from late spring into early fall," Brink told CNN. "Every so often, when the dust plume is large enough and [trade winds](#) set up just right, the dust can travel thousands of miles across the Atlantic and into the U.S."

Right now the cloud is in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and is expected to drift over the U.S. by next Tuesday, the Houston Chronicle reported. It will most likely sap some of the humidity from the air, the Chronicle said.

While its presence is usually innocuous, the dust can irritate people who have respiratory issues, depending on its concentration in the air, the Chronicle said.

While the dust cloud will help keep storms from developing, it's not the particles themselves having that effect, meteorologist Chad Myers told CNN.

"The dust is the visible part of the reduced tropical development potential area," Myers said. "It is the dry air and additional vertical wind shear along with the dust that are the driving factors in limiting tropical storm development."

How will it tamp down storms?

"The dust signifies a very dry layer in the atmosphere, and hurricanes don't like dry air," reports Michigan's MLive.

Moreover, the dry spell could linger for a week or so after the cloud disseminates, MLive said.

Saharan dust tends to cross the ocean during June and July, according to WBBH-TV. Satellite measurements a few years ago revealed just how much.

Winds routinely scoop up on average 182 million tons each year and loft it toward the Western Hemisphere, NASA found in a 2015 study—equivalent to 689,290 semitrucks filled with [dust](#), the [space agency](#) said in a statement at the time.

The plumes that land farther south than the U.S. nourish the Amazon rainforest, the researchers found by studying a seven-year span. By the time it reaches the eastern coast of South America it has dwindled to 132 million tons, 27.7 million of which fall over the Amazon basin. That's enough to fill 104,908 semis, NASA said. Another 43 million tons drift over the Caribbean Sea, the researchers said in the February 2015 study, published in *Geophysical Research Letters*.

All in all, the connection between a faraway African land and the shores of the United States point to one thing, as University of Maryland atmospheric scientist Hongbin Yu said of the study, which he co-authored.

"This is a small world," said Yu, who also works at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. "And we're all connected together."

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