

One dead as rare tornado tears through Dutch city

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The whirlwind left a trail of destruction through the southwestern seaside city of Zierikzee.

A tornado ripped through a southwestern Dutch city on Monday, killing a woman and injuring nine others in the first fatal twister to hit the

country for three decades.

The whirlwind left a trail of destruction through the seaside city of Zierikzee, ripping the roofs off homes and toppling trees onto cars, an AFP journalist at the scene said.

Images on social media showed debris rotating in the air in the fierce winds and a huge funnel descending from stormy clouds as the tornado hit the city in the scenic province of Zeeland.

The victim was a 73-year-old woman from Wassenaar, a town near The Hague, police said. Local media said she was a tourist who was hit on the head by a roof tile in the city's harbour area.

"The damage is considerable in several streets in Zierikzee. In addition to flying roof tiles and fallen trees, roofs have been blown off four houses," the Zeeland safety authority said.

One injured person was taken to hospital and eight others were treated on site by paramedics it said, adding that there had been a "huge deployment" of emergency services.

"It got completely dark. Outside you could see everything flying, everything in the air," Zierikzee resident Freek Kouwenberg, 72, told AFP.

"I've never experienced anything like it."

'All hell broke loose'

The tornado hit at the start of the tourism season in Zierikzee, which sits on one of the bridge-connected islands that comprise Zeeland province, whose attractions include a historic fishing harbour and the 15th century

"Fat Tower".

Its path could be traced through one neighbourhood, where the twister tore a huge piece of black roofing off the top of a block of four terraced houses and dumped it in a residential street, an AFP journalist said.



The Netherlands' flat landscape sitting just above sea level makes it vulnerable to extreme weather, although the Dutch meteorological agency KNMI said it only experiences a few tornadoes a year.

A mechanical digger was lifting debris from the road near to where a car lay partly crushed by a tree. Firefighters had sealed off the road with tape while they carried out searches.

Workmen had been carrying out repairs on the roof just before the tornado hit, and fled for their lives, said local resident Ben Dubbeld, 58.

"It was getting closer and closer, so they ran, really ran. I've never seen people run so fast," he told AFP. "They hadn't been downstairs for five seconds and then the whole roof came flying off and all hell broke loose."

Waitress Esmee Koster, 22, said the tornado caused "big chaos".

"It was really completely black and then from the harbour we saw a really huge tornado floating in the air and then we all went inside and closed the doors," she said.

"Everything over the harbour got blown away, the benches... the tables, the parasols."

Footage on social media showed debris swirling through the air. Other images showed the tornado itself spiralling towards the ground as people stopped their cars or left their restaurant tables to watch.

Local authorities arranged shelter for the inhabitants of dozens of rental homes damaged by the twister.

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The last fatal one to hit the country was in 1992, the KNMI said, while the deadliest recorded hit the southern villages of Chaam and Tricht on June 25, 1967, killing seven people. There were also deadly twisters in 1972 and 1981.

"Heavy whirlwinds, also called a tornado, are rare in our country," the KNMI said on its website after Monday's twister.

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