



The Naming of Atlantic Hurricanes

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE • NOAA • NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

History of Hurricane Names

For several hundred years, many hurricanes in the West Indies were named after the particular saint's day on which the hurricane occurred. Ivan R. Tannehill describes in his book "Hurricanes" the major tropical storms of recorded history and mentions many hurricanes named after saints. For example, there was "Hurricane Santa Ana" which struck Puerto Rico with exceptional violence on July 26, 1825, and "San Felipe" (the first) and "San Felipe" (the second) which hit Puerto Rico on September 13 in both 1876 and 1928.

Tannehill also tells of Clement Wragge, an Australian meteorologist, who began giving women's names to tropical storms before the end of the 19th century.

An early example of the use of a woman's name for a storm was in the novel "Storm" by George R. Stewart, published by Random House in 1941, and since filmed by Walt Disney. During World War II, this practice became widespread in weather map discussions among forecasters, especially Air Force and Navy meteorologists who plotted the movements of storms over the wide expanses of the Pacific Ocean.

In 1953, the United States abandoned as confusing a two-year old plan to name storms by a phonetic alphabet (Able, Baker, Charlie) when a new, international phonetic alphabet was introduced. That year, this Nation's weather services began using female names for storms. The practice of naming hurricanes solely after women came to an end in 1978 when men's and women's names were included in the Eastern North Pacific storm lists. In 1979, male and female names were included in lists for the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.



Why Hurricanes Are Named

Experience shows that the use of short, distinctive given names in written as well as spoken communications is quicker and less subject to error than the older more cumbersome latitude-longitude identification methods. These advantages are especially important in exchanging detailed storm information between hundreds of widely scattered stations, airports, coastal bases, and ships at sea.

The use of easily remembered names greatly reduces confusion when two or more tropical storms occur at the same time. For example, one hurricane can be moving slowly westward in the Gulf of Mexico, while at exactly the same time another hurricane can be moving rapidly northward along the Atlantic coast. In the past, confusion and false rumors have arisen when storm advisories broadcast from one radio station were mistaken for warnings concerning an entirely different storm located hundreds of miles away.

Present Procedure in the North Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico

The Tropical Prediction Center near Miami, FL, keeps a constant watch on oceanic storm-breeding areas for tropical disturbances that may herald the formation of a hurricane. If a disturbance intensifies into a tropical storm—with rotary circulation and wind speeds above 39 miles per hour—the Center will give the storm a name from one of the six lists below. The Center uses a new set of names each year beginning with the first name in the set. After the sets have all been used, they are reused. For example, TPC is reusing the 2006 set in 2012. The letters Q, U, X, Y, and Z are not included because of the scarcity of names beginning with those letters. TPC retires a name after a major land-falling storm with major economic impact. For example, Katrina will be retired this year after its devastating impact.

The name lists have an international flavor because hurricanes affect other nations and are tracked by the public and weather services of many countries. Names for these lists are selected from library sources and agreed upon at international meetings of the World Meteorological Organization.

The Six-Year List of Names for Atlantic Storms

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Alberto	Andrea	Arthur	Ana	Alex	Arlene
Beryl	Barry	Bertha	Bill	Bonnie	Bret
Chris	Chantal	Cristobal	Claudette	Colin	Cindy
Debby	Dean	Dolly	Danny	Danielle	Don
Ernesto	Erin	Edouard	Erika	Earl	Emily
Florence	Felix	Fay	Fred	Fiona	Franklin
Gordon	Gabrielle	Gustav	Grace	Gaston	Gert
Helene	Humberto	Hanna	Henri	Hermine	Harvey
Isaac	Ingrid	Ike	Ida	Igor	Irene
Joyce	Jerry	Josephine	Joaquin	Julia	Jose
Kirk	Karen	Kyle	Kate	Karl	Katia
Leslie	Lorenzo	Laura	Larry	Lisa	Lee
Michael	Melissa	Marco	Mindy	Matthew	Maria
Nadine	Noel	Nana	Nicholas	Nicole	Nate
Oscar	Olga	Omar	Odette	Otto	Ophelia
Patty	Pablo	Paloma	Peter	Paula	Philippe
Rafael	Rebekah	Rene	Rose	Richard	Rina
Sandy	Sebastien	Sally	Sam	Shary	Sean
Tony	Tanya	Teddy	Teresa	Tomas	Tammy
Valerie	Van	Vicky	Victor	Virginie	Vince
William	Wendy	Wilfred	Wanda	Walter	Whitney