

Little-known weather terms that may affect your area this year

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As weather becomes more unpredictable, these lesser-known weather phenomena and terms are becoming more common, says Jacob Hinson, a meteorologist at AccuWeather in State College, Pennsylvania. ' Climate change *can lead to more extreme weather* ,' he says. ' *So it's important to stay up to date on emerging terms because they make it easier to categorize what's actually happening* .'

Knowing the latest weather terminology will not only help you know what to wear and whether or not to bring an umbrella, but it will also ensure you're prepared for whatever weather conditions come your way. " *We experience weather every day, so knowing what's going on is important for our health and safety, especially as we start to experience more severe weather impacts,* " says Hinson.

Derecho

A derecho is 'a violent and sustained wind storm.' The winds blow straight up, which is where it gets its name. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), derecho is Spanish for 'straight,' 'straight,' or 'direct.' As opposed to tornado, the Spanish word 'tornar' means 'to rotate.'

To be classified as a derecho, a wind storm must have sustained winds of at least 59 mph (93 km/h), some gusts over 75 mph (120 km/h), and a damaging wind path of at least 250 miles (402 km). These severe storms can produce damaging winds over hundreds of miles and be more than 100 miles (161 km) wide.

If you hear a derecho heading your way, avoid outdoor activities and stay off roads if possible, as winds can flip cars. NOAA also warns against boating or hiking, as winds and high waves can flip boats and even down trees.



Flash drought

Flash drought is a drought that begins or worsens very quickly. This type of unpredictable weather occurs when low rainfall is combined with high temperatures, strong winds, or high radiation. Flash droughts can cause severe damage to agriculture and ecosystems.

The term flash drought is not old. It was coined in the early 2000s by climatologist Mark Svoboda, Ph.D., director of the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He came up with the term on the fly while trying to explain to a reporter the rapidly developing droughts that were affecting the Delta at the time.

Haboob

Haboobs are large dust storms that form as a result of thunderstorms, typically in the Southwest. You'll see a lot of them in Arizona, especially during the monsoon season, which runs from late summer to early fall. They pose a potential danger because of their reduced visibility.

Heat dome

Heat domes can be a climate term of the summer, with dangerous heat waves sweeping across the country. Heat domes are essentially heat trapped under high pressure. It is a phenomenon associated with jet streams that traps sweltering weather.

High temperatures can stay that way for weeks, which isn't exactly comfortable for humans. If you don't remember growing up with heat domes, that's because they're much more common now. A 2025 study by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found that heat domes—and some other forms of extreme weather—have tripled in the past 50 years.



Mud flow

A mudflow is similar to a landslide, but with more water. The water is mixed with soil and debris, but it is not a muddy mess. It is similar to the consistency of pancake batter, according to the Colorado Geological Society.

So what's the difference between a mudflow and a landslide? In a mudflow, more than half the particles are sand-sized or smaller. A mudflow might sound like just a muddy mess, but make no mistake: Mudslides and landslides can be quite dangerous. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), these weather-related events kill 25 to 50 people in the United States each year.

Storm Nor'easter

A Nor'easter is a low-pressure storm with winds blowing from the Northeast. In fact, that's where its name comes from.

Nor'easters are a winter storm mix that bring heavy rain or snowfall and strong winds that often cause coastal damage. They typically start along the Southeast coast and intensify as they move up. While northeast winds are currently uncommon, they are becoming more intense, according to a 2025 study by the University of Pennsylvania.

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