

# Section 7: Windstorm Hazards in the City of Carson

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### **Why are Severe Windstorms a Threat to the City of Carson**

Severe wind storms pose a significant risk to life and property in the region by creating conditions that disrupt essential systems such as public utilities, telecommunications, and transportation routes. High winds can and do occasionally cause tornado-like damage to local homes and businesses. Severe windstorms can present a very destabilizing effect on the dry brush that covers local hillsides and urban wildland interface areas. High winds can have destructive impacts, especially to trees, power lines, and utility services.

**Figure 7-1: Santa Ana Winds (Source: NASA's "Observatorium")**



### **Windstorm Characteristics**

#### **Santa Ana Winds and Tornado-Like Wind Activity**

Based on local history, most incidents of high wind in the City of Carson are the result of the Santa Ana wind conditions. While high impact wind incidents are not frequent in the area, significant Santa Ana Wind events and sporadic tornado activity have been known to negatively impact the local community.

#### **What are Santa Ana Winds?**

“Santa Ana winds are generally defined as warm, dry winds that blow from the east or northeast (offshore). These winds occur below the passes and canyons of the coastal ranges of Southern California and in the Los Angeles basin. Santa Ana winds often blow with exceptional speed in the Santa Ana Canyon (the canyon from which it derives its name). Forecasters at the National Weather Service offices in Oxnard and San Diego usually place speed minimums on these winds and reserve the use of "Santa Ana" for winds greater than 25 knots.”<sup>1</sup> These winds accelerate to speeds of 35 knots as they move through canyons and passes, with gusts to 50 or even 60 knots.

“The complex topography of Southern California combined with various atmospheric conditions creates numerous scenarios that may cause widespread or isolated Santa Ana events. Commonly, Santa Ana winds develop when a region of high pressure builds over the Great Basin (the high plateau east of the Sierra Mountains and west of the Rocky mountains including most of Nevada and Utah). Clockwise circulation around the center of this high pressure area forces air downslope from the high plateau. The air warms as it descends toward the California coast at the rate of 5 degrees F per 1000 feet due to compressional heating. Thus, compressional heating provides the primary source of warming. The air is dry since it originated in the desert, and it dries out even more as it is heated.”<sup>2</sup>

These regional winds typically occur from October to March, and, according to most accounts are named either for the Santa Ana River Valley where they originate or for the Santa Ana Canyon, southeast of Los Angeles, where they pick up speed.

### What are Tornadoes?

Tornadoes are spawned when there is warm, moist air near the ground, cool air aloft, and winds that speed up and change direction. An obstruction, such as a house, in the path of the wind causes it to change direction. This change increases pressure on parts of the house, and the combination of increased pressures and fluctuating wind speeds creates stresses that frequently cause structural failures.

In order to measure the intensity and wind strength of a tornado, Dr. T. Theodore Fujita developed the Fujita Tornado Damage Scale. This scale compares the estimated wind velocity with the corresponding amount of suspected damage. The scale measures six classifications of tornadoes with increasing magnitude from an “F0” tornado to a “F6+” tornado.

**Table 7-1: Fujita Tornado Damage Scale**

Scale	Wind Estimate (mph)	Typical Damage
F0	< 73	<b>Light damage.</b> Some damage to chimneys and TV antennas; breaks twigs off trees; pushes over shallow-rooted trees.
F1	73-112	<b>Moderate damage.</b> Peels surface off roofs; windows broken; light trailer houses pushed or overturned; some trees uprooted or snapped; moving automobiles pushed off the road. 74 mph is the beginning of hurricane wind speed.
F2	113-157	<b>Considerable damage.</b> Roofs torn off frame houses leaving strong upright walls; weak buildings in rural areas demolished; trailer houses destroyed; large trees snapped or uprooted; railroad boxcars pushed over; light object missiles generated; cars blown off highway.
F3	158-206	<b>Severe damage.</b> Roofs and some walls torn off frame houses; some rural buildings completely demolished; trains overturned; steel-framed hangar-warehouse-type structures torn; cars lifted off the ground; most trees in a forest uprooted snapped, or leveled.
F4	207-260	<b>Devastating damage.</b> Whole frame houses leveled, leaving piles of debris; steel

		structures badly damaged; trees debarked by small flying debris; cars and trains thrown some distances or rolled considerable distances; large missiles generated.
F5	261-318	<b>Incredible damage.</b> Whole frame houses tossed off foundations; steel-reinforced concrete structures badly damaged; automobile-sized missiles generated; trees debarked; incredible phenomena can occur.
F6-F12	319 to sonic	<b>Inconceivable damage.</b> Should a tornado with the maximum wind speed in excess of F5 occur, the extent and types of damage may not be conceived. A number of missiles such as iceboxes, water heaters, storage tanks, automobiles, etc. will create serious secondary damage on structures.
Source: <a href="http://weather.latimes.com/tornadoFAQ.asp">http://weather.latimes.com/tornadoFAQ.asp</a>		

### Microbursts

Unlike tornados, microbursts, are strong, damaging winds which strike the ground and often give the impression a tornado has struck. They frequently occur during intense thunderstorms. The origin of a microburst is downward moving air from a thunderstorm's core. But unlike a tornado, they affect only a rather small area.

University of Chicago storm researcher Dr Ted Fujita first coined the term “downburst” to describe strong, downdraft winds flowing out of a thunderstorm cell that he believed were responsible for the crash of Eastern Airlines Flight 66 in June of 1975.<sup>3</sup>

A downburst is a straight-direction surface wind in excess of 39 mph caused by a small-scale, strong downdraft from the base of convective thundershowers and thunderstorms. In later investigations into the phenomena he defined two sub-categories of downbursts: the larger macrobursts and small microbursts.<sup>4</sup>

Macroburst are downbursts with winds up to 117 mph which spread across a path greater than 2.5 miles wide at the surface and which last from 5 to 30 minutes. The microburst, on the other hand is confined to an even smaller area, less than 2.5 miles in diameter from the initial point of downdraft impact. An intense microburst can result in damaging winds near 270 km/hr (170 mph) and often last for less than five minutes.<sup>5</sup>

“Downbursts of all sizes descend from the upper regions of severe thunderstorms when the air accelerates downward through either exceptionally strong evaporative cooling or by very heavy rain which drags dry air down with it. When the rapidly descending air strikes the ground, it spreads outward in all directions, like a fast-running faucet stream hitting the sink bottom.

When the microburst wind hits an object on the ground such as a house, garage or tree, it can flatten the buildings and strip limbs and branches from the tree. After striking the ground, the powerful outward running gust can wreak further havoc along its path. Damage associated with a microburst is often mistaken for the work of a tornado, particularly directly under the microburst. However, damage patterns away from the impact area are characteristic of straight-line winds rather than the twisted

pattern of tornado damage.”<sup>6</sup>

Tornados, like those that occur every year in the Midwest and Southeast parts of the United States, are a rare phenomenon in most of California, with most tornado-like activity coming from micro-bursts.

### Local History of Windstorm Events

While the effects of Santa Ana Winds are often overlooked, it should be noted that in 2003, two deaths in Southern California were directly related to the fierce condition. A falling tree struck one woman in San Diego.<sup>7</sup> The second death occurred when a passenger in a vehicle was hit by a flying pickup truck cover launched by the Santa Ana Winds.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 7-2: Santa Ana Wind Events during 2003**

<b>The following Santa Ana wind events were featured in news resources during 2003:</b>	
January 6, 2003 OC Register	“One of the strongest Santa Ana windstorms in a decade toppled 26 power poles in Orange early today, blew over a mobile derrick in Placentia, crushing two vehicles, and delayed Metrolink rail service.” This windstorm also knocked out power to thousands of people in northeastern Orange County.
January 8, 2003 CBSNEWS.com	“Santa Ana’s roared into Southern California late Sunday, blowing over trees, trucks and power poles. Thousands of people lost power.”
March 16, 2003 dailybulletin.com	Fire Officials Brace for Santa Ana Winds - - “The forest is now so dry and so many trees have died that fires, during relatively calm conditions, are running as fast and as far as they might during Santa Ana Winds. Now the Santa Ana season is here. Combine the literally tinder dry conditions with humidity in the single digits and 60-80 mph winds, and fire officials shudder.”

**Table 7-3: Major Windstorms in the City of Cerritos and Surrounding Communities**

Date	Location and Damage
November 5-6, 1961	Santa Ana winds.
February 10-11, 1973	Strong storm winds: 57 mph at Riverside, 46 Newport Beach. Some 200 trees uprooted in Pacific Beach alone
October 26-27, 1993	Santa Ana winds.
October 14, 1997	Santa Ana winds: gusts 87 mph in central Orange County. Large fire in Orange County
December 29, 1997	Gusts 60+ mph at Santa Ana
March 28-29, 1998	Strong storm winds in Orange County: sustained 30-40 mph. Gust 70 mph at Newport Beach, gust 60 Huntington Beach. Trees down, power out, and damage across Orange and San Diego Counties. 1 illegal immigrant dead in Jamul.

September 2, 1998	Strong winds from thunderstorms in Orange County with gusts to 40mph. Large fires in Orange County
December 6, 1998	Thunderstorm in Los Alamitos and Garden Grove: gust 50-60 mph called "almost a tornado"
December 21-22, 1999	Santa Ana winds: gust 68 mph at Campo, 53 Huntington Beach, 44 Orange. House and tree damage in Hemet.
March 5-6, 2000	Strong thunderstorm winds at the coast: gust 60 mph at Huntington Beach Property damage and trees downed along the coast
April 1, 2000	Santa Ana winds: gust 93 mph at Mission Viejo, 67 Anaheim Hills
December 25-26, 2000	Santa Ana winds: gust 87 mph at Fremont Canyon. Damage and injuries in Mira Loma, Orange and Riverside Counties
February 13, 2001	Thunderstorm gust to 89 mph in east Orange
Source: <a href="http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/sandiego/research/Guide/weatherhistory.pdf">http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/sandiego/research/Guide/weatherhistory.pdf</a>	

The following is a glimpse of major tornado-like events to hit the City of Carson, and surrounding areas:

**Table 7-4: Major Tornado-like Events in Orange County**

Major Tornado-like Events in the Orange County Area 1958-2001	
Date	Location and Damage
April 1, 1958	Tornado: Laguna Beach
February 19, 1962	Tornado: Irvine
April 8, 1965	Tornado: Costa Mesa
November 7, 1966	Newport Beach and Costa Mesa: Property Damage
March 16, 1977	Tornado skipped from Fullerton to Brea Damage to 80 homes and injured four people
February 9, 1978	Tornado: Irvine. Property damage and 6 injured
January 31, 1979	Tornado Santa Ana Numerous power outages
November 9, 1982	Tornadoes in Garden Grove and Mission Viejo. Property damage
January 13, 1984	Tornado: Huntington Beach. Property damage
March 16, 1986	Tornado: Anaheim. Property damage
February 22-24, 1987	Tornadoes and waterspouts: Huntington Beach
January 18, 1988	Tornadoes: Mission Viejo and San Clemente. Property damage
February 28, 1991	Tornado: Tustin
March 27, 1991	Tornado: Huntington Beach
December 7, 1992	Tornadoes: Anaheim and Westminster Property damage
January 18, 1993	Tornado: Orange County Property damage

February 8, 1993	Tornado: Brea. Property damage
February 7, 1994	Tornado from Newport Beach to Tustin. Roof and window damage. Trees were also knocked down
December 13, 1994	Two waterspouts about 0.5 mile off Newport Beach
December 13, 1995	Funnel cloud near Fullerton Airport
March 13, 1996	Funnel cloud in Irvine
November 10-11, 1997	Waterspout came ashore at Newport Pier on the 10 <sup>th</sup> and dissipated over western Costa Mesa. Tornadoes in Irvine on the 11 <sup>th</sup> and a funnel cloud developed. 10 <sup>th</sup> : Winds estimated at 60-70 mph. 11 <sup>th</sup> : Minor power outages occurred with little property damage. A fisherman was blown from one end of Newport Pier to the other. Property and vehicle damage in Irvine from flying debris. Ten cars were thrown a few feet.
December 21, 1997	Waterspout and tornado in Huntington Beach. Damage to boats, houses, and city property
February 24, 1998	Tornado in Huntington Beach. Property damage with a power outage, roof flew ¼ mile
March 13-14, 1998	Numerous waterspouts between Long Beach, Huntington Beach, and Catalina
March 31-April 1, 1998	Numerous funnel clouds reported off Orange County coastline, two of which became waterspouts off Orange County. One waterspout briefly hit the coast off the Huntington Beach pier.
June 6, 1998	Two funnel clouds off Dana Point
December 31, 1998	Funnel clouds in Santa Ana. Waterspout off Costa Mesa coast
February 21, 2000	Tornado: Anaheim Hills. Property damage
October 28, 2000	Funnel clouds around Newport Beach and Costa Mesa
January 10, 2001	Funnel cloud at Orange County airport and Newport Beach
February 24, 2001	Tornado in Orange. Damage to warehouse, 6 structures, fences, and telephone wires.
Source: <a href="http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/sandiego/research/Guide/weatherhistory.pdf">http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/sandiego/research/Guide/weatherhistory.pdf</a>	

## Windstorm Hazard Assessment

### Hazard Identification

A windstorm event in the region can range from short term microburst activity lasting only minutes to a long duration Santa Ana wind condition that can last for several days as in the case of the January 2003 Santa Ana wind event. Windstorms in the City of Carson area can cause extensive damage including heavy tree stands, road and highway infrastructure.

The map shows clearly the direction of the Santa Ana winds as they travel from the stable, high-pressure weather system called the Great Basin High through the canyons

and towards the low-pressure system off the Pacific. Clearly the area of the City is in a direct path of the ocean-bound Santa Ana winds.

**Vulnerability and Risk**

With an analysis of the high wind and tornado events depicted in the “Local History” section, we can deduce the common windstorm impact areas including impacts on life, property, utilities, infrastructure and transportation. Additionally, if a windstorm disrupts power to local residential communities, the American Red Cross and City resources might be called upon for care and shelter duties. Displacing residents and utilizing City resources for shelter staffing and disaster cleanup can cause an economic hardship on the community.

**Community Windstorm Issues**

**What is Susceptible to Windstorms?**

**Life and Property**

Based on the history of the region, windstorm events can be expected, perhaps annually, across widespread areas of the region which can be adversely impacted during a windstorm event. This can result in the involvement of City emergency response personnel during a wide-ranging windstorm or microburst tornadic activity. Both residential and commercial structures with weak reinforcement are susceptible to damage. Wind pressure can create a direct and frontal assault on a structure, pushing walls, doors, and windows inward. Conversely, passing currents can create lift suction forces that pull building components and surfaces outward. With extreme wind forces, the roof or entire building can fail causing considerable damage.

Debris carried along by extreme winds can directly contribute to loss of life and indirectly to the failure of protective building envelopes, siding, or walls. When severe windstorms strike a community, downed trees, power lines, and damaged property can be major hindrances to emergency response and disaster recovery.

The Beaufort Scale below, coined and developed by Sir Francis Beaufort in 1805, illustrates the effect that varying wind speed can have on sea swells and structures:

**Table 7-5: Beaufort Scale**

<b>BEAUFORT SCALE</b>		
Beaufort Force	Speed (mph)	Wind Description - State of Sea - Effects on Land
0	Less 1	Calm - Mirror-like - Smoke rises vertically
1	1-3	Light - Air Ripples look like scales; No crests of foam - Smoke drift shows direction of wind, but wind vanes do not

2	4-7	Light Breeze - Small but pronounced wavelets; Crests do not break - Wind vanes move; Leaves rustle; You can feel wind on the face
3	8-12	Gentle Breeze - Large Wavelets; Crests break; Glassy foam; A few whitecaps - Leaves and small twigs move constantly; Small, light flags are extended
4	13-18	Moderate Breeze - Longer waves; Whitecaps - Wind lifts dust and loose paper; Small branches move
5	19-24	Fresh Breeze - Moderate, long waves; Many whitecaps; Some spray - Small trees with leaves begin to move
6	25-31	Strong Breeze - Some large waves; Crests of white foam; Spray - Large branches move; Telegraph wires whistle; Hard to hold umbrellas
7	32-38	Near Gale - White foam from breaking waves blows in streaks with the wind - Whole trees move; Resistance felt walking into wind
8	39-46	Gale - Waves high and moderately long; Crests break into spin drift, blowing foam in well marked streaks - Twigs and small branches break off trees; Difficult to walk
9	47-54	Strong Gale - High waves with wave crests that tumble; Dense streaks of foam in wind; Poor visibility from spray - Slight structural damage
10	55-63	Storm - Very high waves with long, curling crests; Sea surface appears white from blowing foam; Heavy tumbling of sea; Poor visibility - Trees broken or uprooted; Considerable structural damage
11	64-73	Violent Storm - Waves high enough to hide small and medium sized ships; Sea covered with patches of white foam; Edges of wave crests blown into froth; Poor visibility - Seldom experienced inland; Considerable structural damage
12	>74	Hurricane - Sea white with spray. Foam and spray render visibility almost non-existent - Widespread damage. Very rarely experienced on land.

Source: <http://www.compuweather.com/decoder-charts.html>

### **Disruption of Critical Services**

Critical facilities include police stations, fire stations, hospitals, shelters, and other facilities that provide important services to the community. These facilities and their services need to be functional after an earthquake event.

### **Utilities**

Historically, falling trees have been the major cause of power outages in the region. Windstorms such as strong microbursts and Santa Ana Wind conditions can cause flying debris and downed utility lines. For example, tree limbs breaking in winds of only 45 mph can be thrown over 75 feet. As such, overhead power lines can be damaged even in relatively minor windstorm events. Falling trees can bring electric power lines down to the pavement, creating the possibility of lethal electric shock. Rising population growth and new infrastructure in the region creates a higher probability for damage to occur from windstorms as more life and property are exposed to risk.

### **Infrastructure**

Windstorms can damage buildings, power lines, and other property and infrastructure due to falling trees and branches. During wet winters, saturated soils cause trees to become less stable and more vulnerable to uprooting from high winds.

Windstorms can result in collapsed or damaged buildings or blocked roads and bridges, damaged traffic signals, streetlights, and parks, among others. Roads blocked by fallen trees during a windstorm may have severe consequences to people who need access to emergency services. Emergency response operations can be complicated when roads are blocked or when power supplies are interrupted. Industry and commerce can suffer losses from interruptions in electric services and from extended road closures. They can also sustain direct losses to buildings, personnel, and other vital equipment. There are direct consequences to the local economy resulting from windstorms related to both physical damages and interrupted services.

### **Increased Fire Threat**

Perhaps the greatest danger from windstorm activity in Southern California comes from the combination of the Santa Ana winds with the major fires that occur every few years in the urban/wildland interface. With the Santa Ana winds driving the flames, the speed and reach of the flames is even greater than in times of calm wind conditions. The higher fire hazard raised by a Santa Ana wind condition requires that even more care and attention be paid to proper brush clearances on property in the wildland/urban interface areas.

### **Transportation**

Windstorm activity can have an impact on local transportation in addition to the problems caused by downed trees and electrical wires blocking streets and highways. During periods of extremely strong Santa Ana winds, major highways can be temporarily closed to truck and recreational vehicle traffic. However, typically these disruptions are not long lasting, nor do they carry a severe long term economic impact on the region.

End Notes:

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1 <http://nimbo.wrh.noaa.gov/Sandiego/snawind.html>

2Ibid

3Keith C. Heidorn at <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/13646/100918>, June 1, 2003

4Ibid

5Ibid

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6Ibid

7www.cbsnews.com, January 8, 2003

8[www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/06/national/](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/06/national/)