



November 2006

# ZOOM

in on america

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## CLIMATE & WEATHER in the UNITED STATES



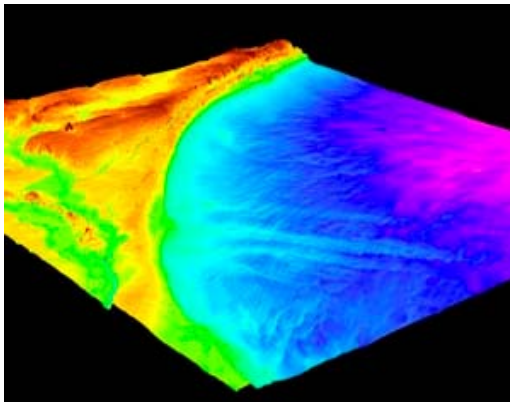
Lone birch tree stands amidst a mosaic of fall colors in the Sawtooth Mountain Range near Tofte, Minn., off the North Shore of Lake Superior, Sept. 27, 1997 Photo © AP Images/Jim Mone

The English have earned themselves a reputation of an extremely weather-conscious nation. “What does the forecast say for tonight?” or “What a lovely day, isn’t it?” or, more frequently perhaps: “What awful weather we’re having today!” are commonly overheard questions, comments and exclamations. The proverb claims: “Like father, like son”, and so Zoom in on America has set off to find the importance of weather for the Americans.

... But first ...

### BREAKING NEWS

The U.S. population has reached **300 million** inhabitants. This happened on October 17 at about 7:46 a.m. . Of course this is only an official estimate. In a country as big as the U.S. it is not possible to point exactly to the 300th million American. Visit the U.S. Census Bureau website at: <http://www.census.gov/> and you can observe how fast the world’s and the American population is changing. This clock really is ticking!



Sea floor displacements caused by undersea earthquakes are the cause of huge waves called "tsunami". As tsunamis threaten the Pacific shore areas it is important to forecast them as early as possible. The photo shows digital elevation models, designed to improve forecasting for early tsunami warning system.  
Photo NOAA

## American Weather

In a country with an area of 9,363,520 km<sup>2</sup> and six time zones, where greatest distances (not including Alaska) exceed 4,500 km (east-west) and 2,500 km (north-south), a country whose northernmost state (Alaska) lies beyond the Arctic Circle while the southernmost (Hawaii), a little below the Tropic of Cancer at 20° latitude, climate and weather vary considerably. America's Death Valley in California is the world's runner up for the highest temperature with 57°C measured on July 10, 1913. The lowest temperature in the U.S., -62°C, was recorded at Prospect Creek, Alaska. The difference is then 119°C. Precipitation can vary dramatically: from less than 5cm at Death Valley to 1,170cm at Mount Waialeale in Hawaii. Disregarding extremes, however, the climate in most of the United States is moderate.

Still, it is the United States that experiences nature's most violent weather phenomena. Hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, flooding, droughts and even tsunamis are unfortunately relatively common occurrences.

### TORNADOES

In about 800 tornadoes reported each year in the U.S., 80 people die and 1,500 get injured. A tornado is defined as a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground. Tornadoes most often affect the Great Plains as weather systems move east from the Rocky Mountains. Weak tornadoes that form over warm water are called waterspouts. They occur commonly along the Gulf Coast and southeastern states.

An extremely useful device which detects the coming tornado is weather radar. It detects air movement towards or away from the radar. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Weather Radio keeps its listeners informed about the weather and issues severe thunderstorm and tornado warnings for areas where they are expected.

NOAA's website provides detailed information on dangers connected with weather and natural disasters. The website also provides useful information on how to behave if caught in a dangerous situation. It abolishes certain myths, such as a belief that it is good to leave the windows open when a tornado is approaching. In fact, opening windows allows damaging winds

to enter the building.

According to NOAA the best preventive measure is to keep updated on weather conditions. After hearing a tornado warning, you should move to a pre-designated shelter, such as a basement. When a tornado comes, you should stay away from windows, get out of automobiles, and abandon mobile homes.

There is no way to prevent tornadoes from happening, but if people are aware of the dangers and know how to behave when they come, the number of casualties can be kept to a minimum.

### HURRICANES

A hurricane is a severe tropical storm that forms over warm tropical oceans. Hurricanes produce violent winds, huge waves, torrential rains and floods. Hurricanes rotate in counterclockwise direction around an "eye". Over a three-year period, approximately 5 hurricanes strike the U.S. coastline from Texas to Maine. Summer months are the hurricane season. When hurricanes move onto land, rain, strong winds and waves can damage buildings, trees and cars. The heavy waves are called a storm surge.

Hurricane Katrina was the third-strongest landfalling U.S. hurricane, and the most costly (it caused \$81.2 billion in damage). Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast area of Louisiana, affecting the city of New Orleans most severely. Its aftermath was the flooding of the city when levees separating Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans were breached by the surge. Katrina was also the deadliest U.S. hurricane since 1928 leaving 1836 people dead.



What looks like a beautiful snow-white cloud against the tranquil blue sky is in fact the developed eyewall of Hurricane Katrina. The photo was taken on Aug. 28, 2005, on board of a NOAA WP-3D Orion hurricane hunter aircraft before the storm made landfall on the United States Gulf Coast.

Photo NOAA

### Stay Prepared

Americans have to be concerned about the weather. Organizations such as National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or Red Cross help prepare and inform Americans of weather threats and provide help when these events happen.

Text by AIRC, Krakow on the basis of information on NOAA website: <http://www.noaa.gov/>



Gene Kelly in the famous scene from the film  
Photo © AP Photo

## Rain, rain go away; come again another day...

... But not for Don Lockwood, played by Gene Kelly (really Eugene Curran Kelly), who does not mind the rain, or actually the real downpour in one of the most famous musicals of all times: "Singing in the Rain" (1952). In the iconic scene (see photo), full not only the unforgettable tune of the title song, but also of an energetic tap dance, he twirls around the lamp-post singing his love to Kathy (Debbie Reynolds): "The sun's in my heart/ And I'm ready for love (You can find the lyrics on the Internet, e.g. at: <http://www.lyricsondemand.com/soundtracks/s/singintherainlyrics/singintherainlyrics.html>)

share the Post-war euphoria that had Kelly singing in the rain? Where today can we still find people who experience love the way Don loved Kathy?

Does anyone in modern-day America

## Cool down

Americans couldn't live without air conditioning. Central air systems have conquered public facilities, cars and private homes. Nothing is as cool as an American office on a hot summer day.

The origins of air conditioning are connected with a medical doctor and the concern he had for his patients. Dr John Gorrie knew that the bedridden sick were uncomfortable in hot, stuffy rooms. In 1842 using compressor technology, he created ice, which he used to cool air for his patients.

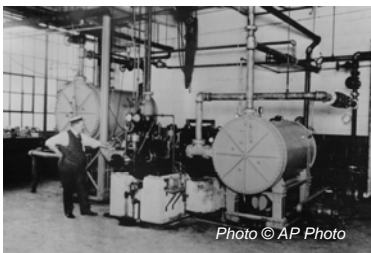


Photo © AP Photo

However, it is Willis H. Carrier who is named the father of air conditioning. He constructed the first centrifugal refrigeration machine, shown in this photo from 1922.

The first residential air conditioner was not necessarily very small, as can be seen in this photo taken at the Atlanta History Center exhibition in 2001. The exhibition showed how southerners handled



Photo © AP Photo/John Bazemore

summertime heat before and after the advent of modern air conditioning and refrigeration.

## Dog Days

The expression 'dog days of summer' is used about the hottest and most humid days of the year. Dogs, as is well-known, and especially hairy ones, are not too fond of such weather. However, if they happen to be film stars, like Benji, who starred "Benji: from Rags to Riches," (in the photo below), they are entitled to protection from the heat. The other photo shows a special air conditioning unit which pumped cool air into an enclosure to cool Benji during triple-digit temperatures on the set of the movie on July 24, 2003, in Ogden, Utah.



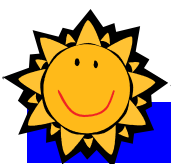
Photos © AP Photo/Douglas C. Pizac

## Counting Clouds

There are many idioms with the word "cloud" in English. To 'have one's head in the clouds' means to be absentminded or impractical, "every cloud has a silver lining" gives us some hope in even very difficult situations, if you are "under a cloud" you are out of favor or in trouble, whereas "to be on cloud nine" means to be blissfully happy. Looking at the photo of Ethon Hicks, fishing on Gunnison River, Colorado, we weren't sure which expression to use.



Photo © AP Photo/Nathan Blouw



# Activity Page

## Win a Prize!

**November 2006 contest:**  
Which American city suffered most from Hurricane Katrina?

Send your answer to [zoom@usinfo.pl](mailto:zoom@usinfo.pl).

Give your name and address. The deadline is December 5

Answer to "Win a Prize" in the October 2006 issue: Chronometer measures time

Congratulations to the winners: Michał from Częstochowa, Paulina from Szczecin, Alicja from Częstochowa

Book prizes will be sent to you by mail.

Find answers to activities on this page at [www.usinfo.pl/zoom/](http://www.usinfo.pl/zoom/)

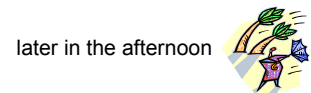
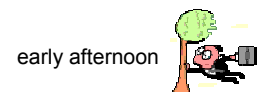
**EXERCISE 1** Look at the NOAA map below and make comments about important climate events in the U.S. in 2005, e.g. *Heavy rains and flooding affected northeastern states in October.*

**EXERCISE 2** Use the weather symbols to prepare a weather forecast for tomorrow.

## Significant U.S. Weather and Climate Events for 2005



e.g.: *There's going to be a lot of sunshine in the morning*



## Glossary - (in the order of appearance)

- weather conscious** - thinking that weather is very important
- Tropic of Cancer** - latitude line 23° north of the equator
- runner up** - a competitor who has finished in second place
- precipitation** - rain, snow or hail
- drought** - a long period of time with no rain
- shelter** - covered place made to protect people from bad weather
- abandon** - leave
- casualty** - a person injured or killed in an accident or in a war
- approximately** - close to the actual number
- aftermath** - a situation that is the result of something
- levee** - natural or artificial embankment or dike
- breach** - break
- tranquil** - calm or peaceful
- downpour** - very heavy rain
- stuffy** - unpleasantly warm
- bedridden** - a person who is sick and must stay in bed
- centrifugal** - directed outwards from the center

**EXERCISE 3** Seven words have been removed from the text below. Put them back in appropriate places.

### United States Helping To Save Tropical Forests, Cut Foreign Debt

A U.S. conservation program ..... (1) in 1998 is a "win-win" ..... (2) that helps protect the global environment while promoting the economies of the ..... (3) world, U.S. officials say.

Eleven developing countries are ..... (4) with the United States under the Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA), which aims to help save the world's ..... (5) forests by forgiving some of the official debt ..... (6) by these nations to the United States.

This so-called "debt-for-nature swap" also strengthens civil society by providing small grants to ..... (7) organizations (NGOs) and local communities.

(a) tropical; (b) partners; (c) enacted; (d) owed; (e) nongovernmental; (f) deal; (g) developing.

(fragment of the text on *US-INFO.STATE.GOV* website: <http://usinfo.state.gov/>)

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**Warsaw**  
Ambasada USA  
ul. Piękna 14, 00-540  
Warszawa  
[airc\\_warsaw@state.gov](mailto:airc_warsaw@state.gov)

**Krakow**  
Konsulat Generalny USA  
ul. Stolarska 9,  
31-043 Krakow  
[KrakowAIRC@state.gov](mailto:KrakowAIRC@state.gov)