

13 November 2019

Tornado in New Hanover: KwaZulu-Natal

A severe thunderstorm which produced a tornado was observed near the town of New Hanover, KwaZulu-Natal during the afternoon of Tuesday 12th November 2019. There have been numerous images and videos doing rounds on social media, in relation to this extremely destructive weather phenomenon. According to media reports, at least two people have lost their lives during the incident. The South African Weather Service (SAWS) would like to express its condolences to those who have lost property or loved ones during this incident.

At this stage, further urgent investigation as to the nature and extent of damage inflicted on structures and vegetation will be undertaken by the SAWS. Only then will there be sufficient information to make a determination as to the **strength** (in relation to the Enhanced Fujita (EFF) scale) of this particular tornadic event.

Guidance from South African Weather Service

The potential for severe weather on this day was identified by the forecasters at SAWS and a WATCH was issued for severe thunderstorms in KwaZulu-Natal at 05:53 local time on the morning of 12th November 2019. This was upgraded to a warning at 14:32 local time for selected local municipalities. As is standard practice in other countries, SAWS issues alerts and warnings for severe thunderstorms that could lead to tornadoes, but not for individual tornadoes.

What is a tornado?

A tornado is a violent rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground. Its destructive capacity is primarily due to extremely strong, rotating winds in and around the vortex tube. A tornado will typically form under atmospheric conditions characterised by moderate to

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strong wind shear (change in wind speed and/or direction with height) and strong atmospheric instability.

The unfortunate prevalence of hoaxes

While the South African Weather Service appreciates authentic footage on this confirmed tornado (and other weather phenomena), it is unfortunate that, once again, the phenomenon of fake or hoax news on certain platforms occurred, which could create confusion, fear and panic amongst the public. A hoax message contains part of the truth, with added inaccuracies. We therefore urge the public to respond only to severe storm information sourced from reputable agencies with the mandate to issue and distribute weather-related warnings, such as the South African Weather Service (SAWS) as well as national and provincial Disaster Management.

Outlook for the rest of the week

There is a sustained high risk of further severe weather conditions over the eastern half of the country for the next 3 days, with possibility of strong damaging winds, hail, as well as heavy downpours. KwaZulu-Natal is expected to be the province particularly affected by these extreme conditions. With the high amounts of rain that has already been experienced, the risk for flooding is very high in places.

The South African Weather Service will continue to monitor any further developments relating to this weather system and will issue subsequent updates as required. Furthermore, the public is urged to regularly follow weather forecasts on television and radio.

Updated information in this regard will regularly be available at www.weathersa.co.za as well as via the SA Weather Service Twitter account **@SAWeatherServic**

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