

Progress Monitoring Probe 10

Dust Devils

Have you ever noticed swirling tunnels of dust that look like tiny tornadoes? These small whirlwinds, which are usually seen over open areas, are called dust devils. They are actually rapidly rotating columns of air, and they are fascinating to watch. Some dust devils may move together in a line as if they are marching in a parade. Others may twist, hop, and turn like twirling dancers.

Dust devils are fairly common during the spring and summer, especially in dry areas such as deserts. They are usually seen on hot, calm days when there are few clouds in the sky. As the sun beats down on the earth during the day, the ground becomes hotter and hotter. This causes the air right above the ground to warm up, and it begins to rise. As the heated air rises, it moves in a spinning motion, creating a funnel. The funnel begins to move across the ground, picking up dust as it goes. This dust makes the spinning air visible, and a dust devil is born.

Experts have observed many different sizes and numbers of dust devils in places all around the world. Eleven dust devils were once spotted moving along together in Africa. In the western United States, several smaller devils were seen following the path of a larger one as if they were a family. While many devils are only several feet tall in height, they can sometimes grow to be several miles tall.

The life of a dust devil is often quite short. Changing wind currents can just as easily destroy the swirling funnels as they can help the devils to form. In some cases, wind currents have supported stronger dust devils for up to eight hours. Now that is a long time to dance under the hot sun!

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Dust Devils (Continued)

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