



Is Mass. getting more tornadoes?



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Officer David Powell surveyed damage from Saturday's tornado in Webster.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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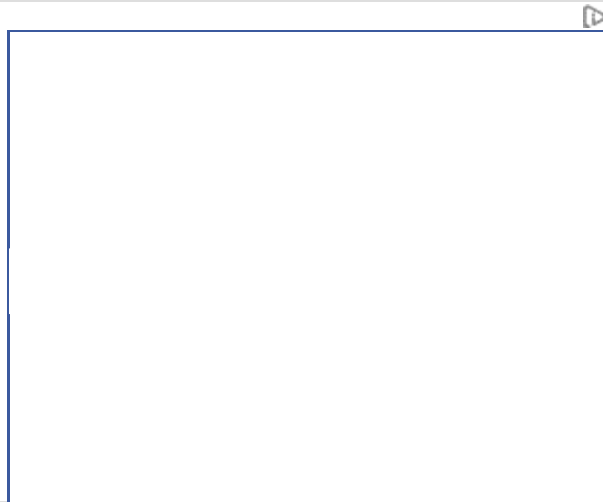
The [tornado that tore through Webster and Dudley on Saturday](#) was the third twister to hit Massachusetts within a 10-day stretch.

That may seem like an alarming statistic, but so far this year, tornado activity in the state is roughly in line with historical trends.

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“This is really kind of typical actually,” said Bill Simpson, meteorologist at the National Weather Service’s bureau in Norton.

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Saturday’s tornado and [two others that touched down on July 26](#) are the only three to hit the state so far in 2018. All three hit communities in Worcester County.

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On average, between two and three tornadoes hit Massachusetts annually, according to [weather service records](#) that date back to the 1950s.

The vast majority strike during the summer months, between June and August, and Worcester County has seen the most, records show. Of course, the numbers fluctuate year to year. “You can have years with none and then you can have years with six or eight tornadoes,” Simpson said.

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There have been some particularly memorable tornadoes locally in recent years.

In [June 2011](#), a tornado cut a 40-mile path from Westfield to Charlton, killing three and damaging or destroying some 1,400 buildings, battering communities from the tiny town of Monson to the busy city of Springfield.

In [2014, one touched down in Revere](#), damaging dozens of buildings there and becoming the first tornado to hit Suffolk County in at least 60 years.

But, Simpson said he hasn't noticed any major change in the frequency or intensity of tornadoes recorded in our area of late.

He noted that long-term comparisons can be tricky because the radar technology used to track the vortices has improved significantly over the years.

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For example, records appear to show a particularly turbulent stretch when 10 tornadoes were recorded Massachusetts in 1956, followed by seven the next year, and a dozen more a year later.

But Simpson said those figures rely on far less sophisticated technology and the numbers may include strong storms that were not actually tornadoes.

"You can get storm bursts [also known as "microbursts"] that can actually cause more damage than a tornado and there can be far more widespread damage, but people didn't know that back then," Simpson said.

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