

# Waterspouts!

**W**ater whirlwinds, commonly called waterspouts, are whirling columns of air and water mist. The mist is mainly fresh water, formed by condensation in the atmosphere. Water whirlwinds are frequent occurrences over Biscayne Bay, particularly in the



rainy season. In fact, Southeast Florida is the second most active waterspout area in the U.S. Waterspouts can be very dangerous and should only be viewed from a safe distance.

## Let's look how a waterspout forms.

Waterspouts tend to come from clouds with dark, flat bottom when there is just the first hint of rain. The first sign is a dark spot on the ocean. Next the wind shifts and increases. An onlooker may see a funnel coming from a cloud overhead or off to one side. Even though it might be invisible, a vortex is reaching the ocean surface from the cloud. When the wind speed reaches around 40 mph, the wind begins to kick up spray in a circular pattern. A funnel begins to form from the cloud and eventually reaches all the way from the cloud to the ocean. You can usually see through the funnel - it's really a thin cloud of tiny water droplets. During this stage, small waves are being kicked up and the spout leaves a bubbly wake as gases are released from the water, like a can of soda when it is first opened. You'll have to be quick to catch one though...the waterspouts will end after about 8-12 minutes as the rain beings to fall.

Biscayne Bubbles

