



NATURAL DISASTERS

“We cannot stop natural disasters, but we can arm ourselves with knowledge: so many lives wouldn't have to be lost if there was enough disaster preparedness.”

Petra Nemcova, Czech co-founder of All Hands and Hearts disaster relief organisation

1. Natural Disasters Discussion

1. How many different natural disasters can you think of?
2. Where is it common for natural disasters to occur? Do they happen in your country?
3. Which countries don't tend to have natural disasters? Why do you think that is?
4. What can people do to avoid being affected by natural disasters? Are you prepared for a natural disaster? If so, how? If not, what could you do to prepare?
5. Why do natural disasters appear to affect poor people more than rich people?
6. Why do people live in areas affected by natural disasters?
7. What is the best way to help people who have been affected by natural disasters? Is it better to donate money to a disaster response charity, or food and clothes directly to people who have been affected by a natural disaster?
8. What can the world do to help people who have been made refugees by natural disasters?

2. Natural Disasters Vocabulary

- **hurricane** (North Atlantic and East Pacific oceans), **cyclone** (South Pacific and Indian oceans), **typhoon** (West Pacific Ocean) (nouns) – *a large tropical storm that forms over the ocean with a wind speed of over 74mph (119kph).*
- **gale, gale force wind** (noun) – *strong winds of 39 to 54mph (63 to 87kph) but not associated with hurricanes, cyclones or typhoons.*
- **wildfire** (noun) – *a fire that occurs in natural places causing large amounts of destruction.*
- **mudslide, landslide, avalanche** (nouns) – *a large amount of wet mud and earth that slides down a hill or mountain (mudslide, landslide); a large amount of snow that falls down a mountain (avalanche).*
- **solar flare** (noun) – *an intense burst of electromagnetic radiation emitted by the Sun that can cause problems with electrical equipment on Earth.*
- **act of God** (noun) – *a natural disaster that nobody is responsible for, often used by insurance companies to describe events they will not pay out for.*

Using the vocabulary words above, complete the following sentences (remember to use the correct form of the word, e.g. verb conjugation or plural noun):

1. A **hurricane** left a trail of destruction in its path as it hit a small Caribbean island yesterday.
2. Deforestation results in an increased risk of **mudslides/landslides** as tree roots help to keep the ground firm and secure.
3. Scientists can predict when a **solar flare** is about to happen by watching out for small flashes on the surface of the Sun.
4. The Met Office issued warnings of **gale force winds/gales** in the north of England that may reach speeds of up to 50mph.
5. Travellers were left out of pocket when their flights were cancelled after a volcano erupted in Iceland grounding planes across Europe. Insurance companies said their policies did not cover **acts of God**.
6. **Wildfires** spread across California throughout 2022, causing multiple fatalities and damage to property.

Natural Disasters vocabulary comprehension questions

1. Do you think hurricanes have become more frequent? If so, why do you think this is? Is there a connection with global warming?
2. What problems do gales cause? What should you do to prepare for gale force winds?
3. Why have there been so many wildfires in the Amazon in recent years? How can we protect against wildfires?
4. What causes mudslides and avalanches?
5. How could we protect against solar flares? What would happen if a solar flare made all electronic devices inoperable?
6. Why don't insurance companies pay out for acts of God?

3. Video: Climate Change & Natural Disasters

You are going to watch a video by BBC News called "Weather disasters over past five decades 'have increased five-fold'."

Watch the video here: <https://yourenglishpal.com/blog/esl-conversation-lesson-plan-natural-disasters/>

While you watch the video, answer the following questions:

Multiple choice

1. While many deaths from natural disasters can be blamed on climate change, what is improving?
a) flood defences b) insurance claims **c) disaster management**
2. What has been growing rapidly due to natural disasters?
a) the number of casualties **b) the economic impact** c) the number of refugees
3. Where did Hurricane Ida cause damage and destruction?
a) Florida **b) Louisiana** c) Mississippi
4. By how much has the economic impact increased since the 1970s?
a) five times b) six times **c) seven times**

Sentence completion

5. The number of people killed by storms, floods and droughts has decreased by **two thirds** over the past 50 years.
6. Approximately **half** of the countries in the world do not have systems in place to give them early warnings of natural disasters.
7. There have been **11,000/11 thousand** water, weather and climate related disasters in the last five decades.
8. Most people who have died in water, weather and climate related disasters lived in **poorer/developing** countries.

Short answer

9. Where were the COP26 climate negotiations held? **Glasgow**
10. When did the three of the biggest storms over the last 50 years occur? **2017**
11. Over which US state did Hurricane Harvey drop millions of tons of water? **Texas**
12. Providing early warning systems is a challenge for whom? **Political leaders in richer countries**

4. Natural Disasters Conversation Questions

1. How can we protect people against floods?
2. Why is coastal erosion becoming more of a problem?
3. What kind of problems do heatwaves cause?
4. What should you do if there is an earthquake? Where are some of the world's major fault lines?
5. Where are tornados common? What should you do if there is a tornado warning?
6. Can you think of any volcanic eruptions? What problems do these cause? What would happen if a super volcano erupted?
7. What causes tsunamis? What would you do if there was a tsunami warning?
8. What would you do if you found out an asteroid was going to hit the Earth? How would this affect society until it happened? How would you survive in the world after it was hit by an asteroid?

5. Natural Disasters Writing Task

Write about your opinion of natural disasters. Try to use some of the vocabulary you learned earlier in this lesson. In your answer, you could include some of the following topics:

- What kind of natural disasters are common.
- How people can be protected from these disasters.
- Whether you think natural disasters are increasing.

Alternative exam practice question:

Many scientists say that climate change has led to stronger and more frequent natural disasters. Do you agree or disagree with this?