

Study ties hurricanes to Sahara

A U.S. government study suggests that the relatively tame 2006 hurricane season may have been tied to activity in Africa's Sahara desert.

The study, by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, found that several major dust storms in June and July in the Sahara sent dust drifting over the Atlantic Ocean, where it prevented sunlight from reaching the water, The Washington Post reported Tuesday.

The lack of sunlight cooled the waters and the dust absorbed the heat, warming the atmosphere and contributing to increased surface winds that aid in evaporation and ocean churning, further cooling the waters.

"This research is the first to show that dust does have a major effect on seasonal hurricane activity," said William Lau, lead author and chief of the Laboratory for Atmospheres at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

Only five hurricanes and four tropical storms were recorded in 2006, a marked decrease from the 15 hurricanes and 12 tropical storms recorded in 2005.

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