

## Cloud Formation

Low pressure weather systems especially have a prescribed sequence of clouds. After a spell of fair/clear weather, usually the first signs of a change coming are high wispy circus clouds. If you check your barometer, it is probably high and about ready to fall.

These high clouds often thicken and may fill the sky. When they do they are called Cirrostratus. Cirrostratus is a white milky ice-crystal cloud. A halo may appear around the sun or moon with cirrostratus clouds. Usually precipitation is 12 to 24 hours away when the sky becomes completely covered by cirrostratus.

The clouds often then continue to lower and thicken. Altostratus or middle layer clouds are often next. They are gray or bluish gray in color. The sun often is still dimly visible through altostratus clouds but gradually fades. Precipitation is often just hours away.

When rain or snow begins, the clouds are nimbostratus (nimbus means rain). Precipitation is usually steady and light to moderate. Sometimes, especially in spring, heavy downpours and thunder may signify some imbedded cumulonimbus in the nimbostratus clouds.

nimbo = rain

Clouds continue to lower during the precipitation. When the air becomes saturated near the ground, fog may form. This is usually a sign you are near a warm front. If the precipitation ends, winds shift to the south or southwest and the skies brighten, the warm front is likely to have passed. The air in the warm sector of storms is usually hazy, unseasonably warm and humid.

Darkening skies and freshening winds are usually the signs that the next change associated with a storm passage, the cold front is approaching. Cumulonimbus clouds often come before or accompany the cold front and bring showers and thunderstorms.

Cumulus clouds often follow generally signifying fair/clear weather. If the air is cold and winds are strong and gusty, the cumulus clouds may fill the sky during the day. These are called stratocumulus. Sprinkles or flurries can fall from these clouds if the air is sufficiently unstable and moist.

Eventually winds diminish, the pressure rises slowly, and blue skies dominate signifying continental polar or, in the west, maritime polar air high pressure is approaching.

After a day or so of fine weather, Circus clouds may appear signifying the approach of the next weather system.