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Desert Sands Aloft

A gargantuan dust storm redistributes the sands of a North African desert in this image from August 8, 2014. This large-scale weather system included many cumulonimbus clouds, or thunderstorms, whose characteristic anvil-shaped tops can be seen protruding through the dust-choked base layer.

We share our atmosphere with all who inhabit this planet, and while the greatest and most immediate impact of African dust storms is on the local population, the impact, as it turns out, is not exclusively local. Evidence suggests these storms play a role in the development of tropical cyclones in the Atlantic, which in turn impact the multinational islands of the Caribbean, and the United States gulf coast and eastern seaboard.

African dust intrusions have even been observed in Houston, TX, where the superfluous airborne particles can contribute to respiratory problems, such as asthma.

