

ARIZONA *The biggest dust storm in living memory rolls into Phoenix on July 5, 2011, reducing visibility to zero. Desert thunderstorms kicked up the mile-highwall of dust and sand.*

DANIEL B



SWITZERLAND *Frozen spray from Lake Geneva entombs cars, trees, and a promenade during a severe cold spell in February 2012. An unusual dip in the polar jet stream, which looped as far south as Africa, brought Arctic air and deep snows to Europe, killing several hundred people.*

MARTIAL TREZZINI, EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY/LANDOV



TEXAS *A flaming fence post marks the trail of a forest fire near Bastrop on September 5, 2011, during a record drought and heat wave. The fire, which destroyed 1,685 houses, may have been sparked by dead pine trees falling onto power lines.*

LARRY W. SMITH, EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY/LANDOV



NEBRASKA

"It was really cranking."

At 130 miles an hour, to be precise—but to photographer Mike Hollingshead, that was not a clue to run the other way. A dedicated storm chaser, Hollingshead caught this funnel on June 20, 2011, outside Bradshaw, near I-80, where it derailed several freight-train cars. A TV crew (far right) also raced in for a closer look.

MIKE HOLLINGSHEAD (ALL)





MISSISSIPPI Fortified by a levee, a house near Vicksburg survives a Yazoo River flood in May 2011. Snowmelt and intense rains— eight times as much rainfall as usual in parts of the Mississippi River watershed—triggered floods that caused three to four billion dollars in damages.
SCOTT OLSON, GETTY IMAGES



Texans have endured dry days before. They've seen lakes vanish and rangeland wither. But the drought of 2011 was gut-kicking even by Texas standards.

