Mount St Helens

When Mount St Helens erupted in the US in 1980, we saw a volcano erupt sideways for the first time. The eruption begins with a landslide – the side of the mountain collapses.

This sideways explosion is a **lateral blast**. The explosion cloud raced over the ground at over 300 mph, travelling over hills and valleys, destroying an area twice the size of Birmingham in just 3 minutes.

Sudden depressurization of the magma chamber triggers an explosive eruption – like uncorking a champagne bottle.

The volcano explodes sideways.

The eruption released 1600 times more thermal energy than the Hiroshima nuclear bomb.

Mount St Helens was the first big volcanic disaster of modern times – it was filmed and photographed with modern cameras. Scientists were able to see the eruption as it happened, and it changed the way we study volcanoes. Today, there is a permanent volcano observatory at Mount St Helens, equipped with many new instruments to help monitor volcanic activity.

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