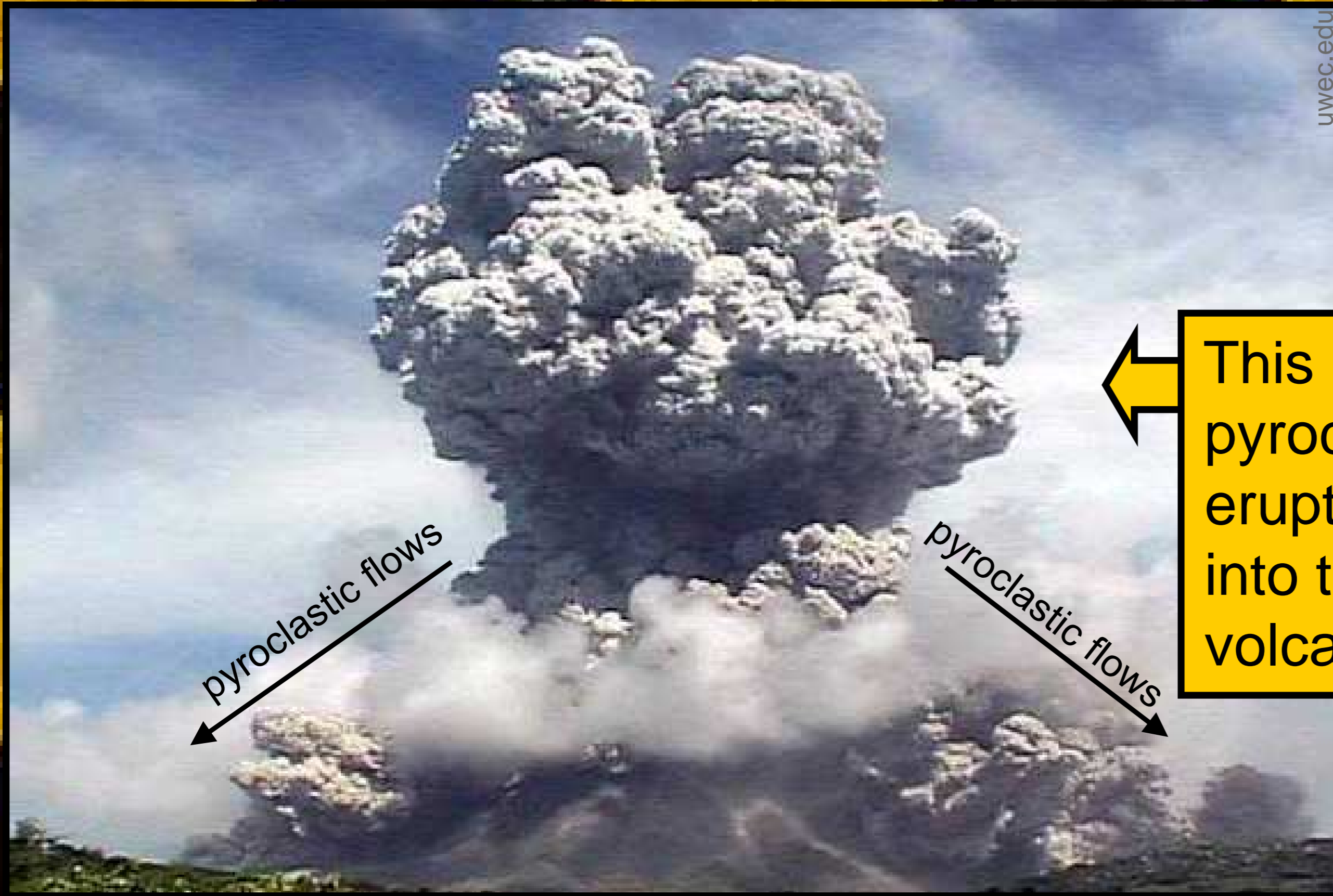


Volcanic Hazards: Pyroclastic Flows

A **pyroclastic flow** is a scorching cloud of gas, ash, and rocks that races along the ground at up to 65 mph, incinerating everything in its path and burying the ruins under metres of rubble. It is the deadliest volcanic hazard.



This picture shows one way that pyroclastic flows can form. Parts of the eruption cloud are too heavy to rise far into the air, collapsing back onto the volcano and racing down the slopes.

Pyroclastic flows can also form when part of a volcano collapses. Hot, glowing boulders of new rock can pile up around the vent, forming domes as big as skyscrapers. But these domes are unstable. They are so hot that when they collapse, the rubble explodes downhill as a devastating pyroclastic flow.



It isn't just their speed that makes pyroclastic flows so deadly – it's that they are so unpredictable. They can even flow uphill, and out over water.



In 1902, pyroclastic flows from the Caribbean volcano Mont Pelée destroyed a nearby city. Out of 29,000 people, only 2 survived – both with serious injuries.

