

Georgia: Overview

Everything in the main manual and the skill guides applies in Georgia exactly as written. What's different here is the specific hazard profile and the state, local, and legal context around it. This page is the starting point; the other three pages under Georgia go deeper on laws, local resources, and the data behind the risks named here.

Tornado risk that reaches into the city, not just rural counties

Georgia sits at the edge of the Southeast's tornado risk zone, and unlike the more rural devastation typical of Midwest tornado outbreaks, Georgia has seen a tornado strike directly through the heart of a major downtown. On March 14, 2008, an EF2 tornado tore through downtown Atlanta itself, damaging the CNN Center and the Georgia Dome, the 13th costliest tornado in U.S. history. Three years later, the April 27, 2011 Ringgold-Apison tornado, part of the largest tornado outbreak ever recorded, killed 24 people in Georgia, the deadliest single tornado to hit the state during that outbreak. See the Risks page for the full data on both.

Water supply: a slower crisis with a legal fight attached

Georgia's other defining risk isn't a single dramatic event, it's water scarcity, made worse by the fact that Atlanta's main water source, Lake Lanier, is shared across state lines. Georgia, Alabama, and Florida spent more than three decades in litigation, the "Tri-State Water Wars," over how much water Georgia's reservoirs can hold back from downstream states. During the severe 2007 drought, Lake Lanier fell to its lowest level since the lake was built in the 1950s, and the Atlanta area came within roughly 35 days of exhausting its water supply. See the Laws page for the interstate legal dispute and the Risks page for the drought data itself.

What this means for how you use the rest of this manual

The manual's Tier structure and the skill guides apply without modification. What's different in Georgia: tornado preparedness (a safe room, a weather radio, a practiced shelter plan) matters even in dense urban areas, not just rural ones, and this manual's water storage and conservation guidance carries extra weight here, Georgia has already come close to a genuine regional water emergency once, and the underlying interstate dispute over the water supply hasn't been permanently resolved.

Sources

- 2008 Atlanta tornado damage and ranking: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS
- 2011 Ringgold-Apison tornado deaths and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS
- Tri-State Water Wars background: Atlanta Regional Commission; Southern Environmental Law Center
- 2007-2008 Georgia drought and Lake Lanier levels: Circle of Blue

Georgia: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: legal with specific codified technical standards

Georgia liberalized its rainwater harvesting rules substantially under the 2010 Georgia Rainwater Harvesting Act, and unlike most states covered on this site, the technical requirements for a system are written directly into the state plumbing code.

Rule	Georgia
Source water	Rooftop catchment
Permit required	No, for typical residential barrels/cisterns; larger systems require a permit
Permitted uses	Non-potable outdoor uses: irrigation, and per the plumbing code, fire protection; drinking water is not permitted
Reservoir standard	Must be an approved, closed vessel built from durable, nonabsorbent, corrosion-resistant material
Filtration	Water must pass through an approved filter system before distribution
Underlying statute	Georgia Rainwater Harvesting Act (2010), codified in the Georgia State Minimum Standard Plumbing Code

Where to find it: the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension (extension.uga.edu) publishes homeowner guidance; check with your county for any additional local ordinances.

Water rights: ordinary riparian rules, overshadowed by a genuine interstate war

Within Georgia, water rights follow the same general riparian reasonable-use framework common across the Southeast. But the legal story that actually matters for anyone relying on metro Atlanta’s water supply isn’t intrastate riparian law, it’s a three-decade interstate legal fight.

The Tri-State Water Wars, briefly

Since 1990, Georgia, Alabama, and Florida have litigated how much water Georgia can hold back in Lake Lanier and other reservoirs on the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint and Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa river systems, water Atlanta depends on for drinking supply, versus how much must flow downstream for Alabama’s and Florida’s own water needs, including endangered species protections in Florida’s Apalachicola Bay. As of recent rulings, litigation between the states in the ACF basin has paused for the first time since 1989, though related appeals remain active. This is not a settled, permanent resolution; the underlying tension between Atlanta’s growing water demand and downstream states’ needs hasn’t gone away.

Where to find it: the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (epd.georgia.gov) administers state water permitting; the Atlanta Regional Commission (atlantaregional.org) tracks the interstate dispute’s current status.

Permitless carry since 2022

Georgia is the fifth permitless-carry state covered on this site, joining Utah, Texas, Florida, and Ohio.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	Permitless ("constitutional") carry, concealed or open, since April 12, 2022 (Senate Bill 319)
Minimum age	21
Disqualifiers	Any state or federal bar on firearm possession
Optional Georgia Weapons Carry License	Still available and useful for reciprocity in states that require a permit from Georgia residents

Permitless doesn't mean unrestricted

Dropping the license requirement didn’t remove location restrictions. Carrying in a legally banned location, schools and certain government buildings among them, remains a criminal offense regardless of whether the carrier has a license.

Sources

- Georgia rainwater harvesting rules and technical standards: Georgia Water Tanks; Georgia Plumbing Code, Chapter 15
- Tri-State Water Wars background and current litigation status: Atlanta Regional Commission; Southern Environmental Law Center
- Georgia permitless carry (SB 319, 2022): Georgia Criminal Defense; Protect With Bear

Georgia: Local Resources

GEMA/HS and Ready Georgia

The Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency runs public preparedness outreach through the Ready Georgia campaign, covering the standard core steps, an emergency plan, a supply kit, and staying informed, alongside year-round emergency management training for professionals and volunteers.

Where to find it: gema.georgia.gov/plan-prepare/ready-georgia.

UGA Cooperative Extension: Georgia's version of the other states' land-grant Extension programs

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension runs the same category of program as every other state covered on this site, through county-based offices statewide.

- **Georgia Master Gardener Extension Volunteer Program:** requires a minimum of 50 hours of core horticultural and risk-management training, followed by 50 hours of volunteer service within the first year to earn certification, then 10 continuing-education hours annually to maintain it.

Where to find it: extension.uga.edu lists the program by county.

CERT: Atlanta's own program plus independent county chapters

Atlanta runs its own city-specific CERT program, the Atlanta Community Emergency Response Team (ACERT), through Atlanta Fire Rescue, alongside independent chapters in surrounding metro counties.

What's available where

ACERT's Basic Training is a free 7-week course open to City of Atlanta community members, covering the standard FEMA curriculum. Outside the city, Fulton, Cobb, and Henry counties, among others, run their own separate CERT chapters through their local emergency management offices, a similar decentralized-with-a-flagship-city pattern to the one seen in a few other states covered on this site.

Where to find it: within Atlanta, Atlanta Fire Rescue. Elsewhere in metro Atlanta or the rest of the state, search “[your county] CERT” or check with your county’s emergency management office.

Sources

- GEMA/HS Ready Georgia campaign: GEMA/HS
- UGA Master Gardener Extension Volunteer Program requirements: UGA Extension
- Atlanta and metro-area CERT program structure: Atlanta Fire Rescue; Fulton County

BY STATE › GEORGIA

Georgia: Risks & Trends

Same standard as every other page on this site: every figure below is independently sourced, and figures that vary across sources, or measure genuinely different things, are flagged as such rather than collapsed into one number that looks more precise than the underlying data actually supports.

The 2008 Atlanta tornado: a rare direct hit on a major downtown

Metric	Figure
Peak rating	EF2
Deaths, full March 14-15, 2008 outbreak	3 (1 in Atlanta)
Injuries, full outbreak	53
Damage, Atlanta tornado alone	~\$500 million
National ranking	13th costliest tornado in U.S. history
Notable structures damaged	CNN Center, Georgia Dome

Most damaging tornadoes strike rural or suburban terrain; this one tracked directly through downtown Atlanta’s dense high-rise core, a genuinely unusual event that demonstrated urban tornado risk isn’t purely theoretical.

The 2011 Ringgold-Apison tornado: the deadliest of the largest outbreak on record

Metric	Figure
Peak rating	EF4
Georgia deaths	24 (including 1 indirect)
Ringgold deaths alone	9
Injuries	335
Economic losses (2024 dollars)	\$88 million+

Part of the largest tornado outbreak ever recorded

This tornado struck on April 27, 2011, during the April 14-16 and 25-28, 2011 tornado outbreak sequence, the largest tornado outbreak in recorded history across the southeastern and midwestern U.S. It was the single deadliest tornado to hit Georgia during that sequence.

The 2007-2008 drought: Atlanta approaches “Day Zero”

Metric	Figure
2007 drought severity ranking	Second driest year on record for the region
Share of the region in "exceptional" drought by year end	1/3+
Lake Lanier water level drop	~20 ft below normal, lowest since the lake's construction in the 1950s
Estimated water supply remaining at worst point	~35 days
Counties under Drought Level 4 (total outdoor watering ban)	64
Mandatory reduction ordered from winter-use baseline	10%

Unlike the two tornadoes above, this wasn't a single dramatic event with a clear before-and-after, it was a slow-building supply crisis that took months to reach its worst point and became the direct trigger for the interstate legal fight covered on the Laws page. Georgia has had 13 long-term severe droughts over the past 325 years, with droughts lasting three or more years occurring roughly once every 40 years on average, making this a recurring risk rather than a one-time event.

What these have in common

Georgia's tornado risk and its water supply risk operate on completely different timescales, minutes of warning for a tornado, months of accumulating deficit for a drought, but both demonstrate the same practical point: a risk doesn't need to be exotic to be serious. Ordinary severe weather and ordinary water-supply management, stressed hard enough, both produced genuine crises here within the last two decades.

Sources

- 2008 Atlanta tornado damage and ranking: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS; 2008 Atlanta tornado outbreak
- 2011 Ringgold-Apison tornado deaths, injuries, and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS
- 2007-2008 Georgia drought and Lake Lanier water level data: Circle of Blue; Georgia drought history