

Illinois: Overview

Everything in the main manual and the skill guides applies in Illinois 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 Illinois go deeper on laws, local resources, and the data behind the risks named here.

Tornadoes: the deadliest single tornado in U.S. history passed through here

The Tri-State Tornado of March 18, 1925, remains the deadliest tornado in recorded U.S. history, and Illinois bore the overwhelming majority of it: 588 of the storm's 695 total deaths were in Illinois, more than 100 of them in the town of Murphysboro alone. That event is a century old, but the risk isn't historical: the November 17, 2013 outbreak, 77 tornadoes across the state in a single day, killed 8 people and caused \$1.6 billion in damage, the deadliest and costliest November tornado outbreak in Illinois history. See the Risks page for the full data on both.

Earthquake risk from a fault system most people don't associate with the Midwest

Southern Illinois sits at the northern edge of the New Madrid Seismic Zone, a major fault system running through the central Mississippi Valley. The USGS puts the 50-year chance of a magnitude 6 or larger earthquake in the zone at 25-40%, and communities in Illinois's southernmost counties, Cairo, Carbondale, and Harrisburg among them, carry meaningfully elevated risk compared to the rest of the state.

Extreme cold: a record that still stands

In January 2019, a polar vortex event pushed Illinois to its coldest recorded temperature ever, -38°F in Mt. Carroll, and killed 3 people in Chicago alone as part of a Midwest-wide death toll of at least 21. Illinois hospitals treated 144 people for cold-related injuries in a single three-day stretch.

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 Illinois: tornado season planning (a safe room or basement, a NOAA weather radio, a practiced shelter plan) matters statewide, not just in a narrow "Tornado Alley" corridor; households in the state's southernmost counties should treat earthquake preparedness as a real consideration, not an afterthought; and extended extreme-cold planning, backup heat, insulated pipes, a plan that doesn't depend on the power grid staying up, deserves the same weight winter storm planning gets in states further north.

Sources

- 1925 Tri-State Tornado Illinois deaths and Murphysboro impact: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS and contemporary records
- November 17, 2013 Illinois tornado outbreak: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS
- New Madrid Seismic Zone earthquake probability and Illinois county risk: Illinois Emergency Management Agency; USGS
- January 2019 polar vortex Illinois temperature record and death toll: ABC7 Chicago; Chicago Sun-Times

Illinois: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: legal under the state plumbing code

Illinois doesn’t have a dedicated rainwater harvesting statute the way some other states do; instead, harvesting systems fall under the state’s general plumbing regulation framework.

Rule	Illinois
Source water	Rooftop catchment
Permit required	Governed by the Illinois Plumbing Code (administered by the Illinois Department of Public Health); check local amendments
Permitted uses	Non-potable: irrigation, toilet flushing, laundry
Potable use	Not regulated as legal or illegal; the state hasn't written treatment standards for drinking harvested rainwater, so it's simply not addressed
Underlying statute	Plumbing-Rainwater Systems provisions (SB0038) built into the Illinois Plumbing Code

Where to find it: the Illinois Department of Public Health (dph.illinois.gov) administers the state plumbing code; check with your municipal building department for any local amendments before installing a system.

Water rights: riparian, with a Great Lakes wrinkle none of the other states have

Illinois uses the same riparian reasonable-use doctrine as Florida, New York, and Pennsylvania for its rivers and streams, but it’s the first state covered on this site that also borders a Great Lake, which adds an entirely separate legal layer.

Water source	Governing framework
Rivers and streams	Common-law riparian reasonable use; domestic needs must be satisfied before any "artificial" use is allowed
Lake Michigan diversions	Governed by U.S. Supreme Court decrees, the Illinois Level of Lake Michigan Act, and the Great Lakes Compact

Illinois has a genuinely unusual legal status under the Great Lakes Compact

The Great Lakes Compact generally restricts diversions of Great Lakes water outside the basin, but Illinois already had a Supreme Court-authorized diversion (through the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, dating back over a century) before the Compact existed. As a result, Illinois isn’t subject to certain Compact provisions on new or increased Great Lakes withdrawals that do apply to the seven other Great Lakes states, a legal quirk specific to Illinois’s history with Lake Michigan.

Where to find it: the Illinois Department of Natural Resources handles state water regulation generally; Lake Michigan-specific diversion questions run through the Illinois State Water Survey.

Firearm ownership itself requires a license here, before concealed carry even enters the picture

Every other state covered on this site regulates concealed carry directly, permitless, shall-issue, or a demanding license process, but none of them require a separate license just to own a firearm at all. Illinois does.

Requirement	Detail
Firearm Owner's Identification (FOID) Card	Required to possess any firearm or ammunition in Illinois at all; \$10, valid 10 years, issued by Illinois State Police
Concealed Carry License (CCL)	A separate license required on top of a valid FOID card; requires 16 hours of training through an ISP-approved instructor; \$150, valid 5 years
Minimum age, FOID	21, or under 21 with a parent/guardian's written consent

Why this two-tier structure matters

In every other state covered so far, the question is simply how hard it is to carry a gun concealed. In Illinois, there's a prior question: a FOID card is required to own a gun at all, kept at home, unloaded, for any purpose, before concealed carry is even relevant. This two-license structure is unique among the states covered on this site.

Sources

- Illinois rainwater harvesting regulation under the Plumbing Code: Illinois Plumbing Authority; LegalClarity
- Illinois riparian water rights and reasonable use doctrine: NOAA/Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Legal Program
- Illinois's Great Lakes Compact status and Lake Michigan diversion history: Great Lakes Compact, Wikipedia
- Illinois FOID card and Concealed Carry License requirements: Giffords Law Center; Illinois State Police FOID FAQ

Illinois: Local Resources

IEMA and Ready Illinois

The Illinois Emergency Management Agency runs public preparedness outreach through the Ready Illinois website, a “one-stop shop” for building an emergency plan and a supply kit, with a different preparedness topic highlighted each month throughout the year.

Reach since launch

Ready Illinois has been active since 2007, and IEMA reports more than half a million people have used the site for disaster preparedness information in that time.

Where to find it: ready.illinois.gov.

University of Illinois Extension: Illinois’s version of the other states’ land-grant Extension programs

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

- **Illinois Master Gardener Program:** requires more than 60 hours of initial training from Extension Educators and State Specialists, followed by 40 volunteer hours to earn certification, then 20 volunteer hours and 10 continuing-education hours annually to maintain it, a heavier initial training load than most other states’ programs covered so far.

Where to find it: extension.illinois.edu/mg lists the program by county, with both in-person and online training options in many areas.

Chicago CERT: federally funded, run directly by the city

Chicago’s CERT program is managed directly by the city’s Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC), with the Chicago Fire Department and Chicago Police Department providing instruction, similar in

structure to New York City's city-run model.

What Chicago's program looks like

Training runs at least four times a year, roughly 27 hours of classroom instruction plus 3 hours of hands-on practical skills, and it's free, funded through a federal Department of Homeland Security grant. Graduates continue with monthly sessions covering CPR, Stop the Bleed, and other ongoing skills.

Where to find it: within Chicago, chicago.gov/CERT. Elsewhere in Illinois, CERT programs are organized locally; search “[your county] CERT” or check with your county’s emergency management office.

Sources

- IEMA Ready Illinois campaign structure and reach: Ready Illinois; Illinois Emergency Management Agency
- Illinois Master Gardener Program training and certification requirements: Illinois Extension
- Chicago CERT program structure and training hours: City of Chicago

BY STATE › ILLINOIS

Illinois: 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 Tri-State Tornado (1925): the deadliest tornado in U.S. history

Metric	Figure
Illinois deaths	588 of 695 total across IL/IN/MO
Murphysboro, IL deaths alone	100+
Total three-state injuries	2,027
Total path length	219 mi
Forward speed through Murphysboro	62 mph
Peak rating	F5
Total duration	3 hr 45 min

Illinois absorbed the overwhelming majority of this storm’s death toll, and its combination of an unusually long, unusually fast-moving path is part of why: at 62 mph forward speed, there was far less warning time than a typical tornado allows, even by 1925 standards before modern radar existed.

The November 17, 2013 outbreak: the same risk, modern data

Metric	Figure
Total tornadoes statewide, single day	77
Illinois deaths	8
Injuries	190+
Damage	~\$1.6 billion
Strongest tornadoes	Two rated EF4, together responsible for 5 of the 8 deaths

Why this is the relevant modern comparison, not just a historical footnote

Nearly 90 years separate these two events, but they demonstrate the same underlying risk: Illinois can produce large, multi-tornado outbreaks in a single day. The 2013 outbreak is the deadliest and costliest November tornado event in Illinois history specifically, showing this risk isn’t confined to the traditional spring tornado season either.

The New Madrid Seismic Zone: a standing probabilistic risk

Metric	Figure
50-year chance of a repeat of the 1811-12 earthquake sequence	7-10%
50-year chance of a magnitude 6+ earthquake in the zone	25-40%
100-year chance of a damaging earthquake in Cairo, IL	50-75%
Risk level for Springfield, Champaign, and the Chicago area	5-25%

Unlike the tornado risk above, this is a standing, probabilistic condition rather than a single documented event, the same kind of framing this site uses for California’s UCERF3 figures and Oregon’s Cascadia probability. Southern Illinois carries meaningfully more of this risk than the rest of the state.

The January 2019 polar vortex: a record that still stands

Metric	Figure
Coldest temperature ever recorded in Illinois (Mt. Carroll)	-38°F
Chicago deaths	3
Midwest-wide deaths	21+
Illinois hospital treatments for cold injury, single 3-day window	144

What these have in common

Illinois carries three structurally different hazard mechanisms, wind, seismic, and extreme cold, none of them hypothetical: the state holds the record for the deadliest tornado in American history, sits within meaningful reach of a major fault system, and set its own all-time cold record within the last decade. A household’s specific exposure depends heavily on where in the state they are, southern counties carry more earthquake risk, the whole state carries real tornado risk, and extreme cold is a statewide concern every winter.

Sources

- 1925 Tri-State Tornado Illinois death toll, path, and speed: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS and contemporary records
- November 17, 2013 Illinois tornado outbreak death toll and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS
- New Madrid Seismic Zone earthquake probability and Illinois-specific risk: Illinois Emergency Management Agency; USGS
- January 2019 polar vortex Illinois record cold and death toll: ABC7 Chicago; Chicago Sun-Times