

Kentucky: Overview

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

December 2021: the deadliest tornado in Kentucky history

On the night of December 10, 2021, a high-end EF4 tornado tracked 165.7 miles across western Kentucky, an unusually long and unusually late-season path, killing 57 people and becoming both the deadliest tornado in Kentucky's recorded history and the deadliest anywhere in the U.S. during the month of December. Mayfield took the worst of it: the storm collapsed the Mayfield Consumer Products candle factory and devastated the downtown business district, with 24 deaths in the county alone. See the Risks page for the full data.

July 2022: catastrophic flash flooding in the Appalachian hollows

Seven months later, a fundamentally different disaster struck the opposite end of the state. Slow-moving "training" thunderstorms dumped 14-16 inches of rain on parts of eastern Kentucky over a few days in late July 2022, and the region's narrow hollows and steep terrain turned that rain into flash floods with almost no warning. The flooding killed at least 43 people, damaged or destroyed nearly 9,000 homes, and required more than 600 helicopter rescues.

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 Kentucky: tornado preparedness matters even outside the traditional spring season, the 2021 outbreak struck in December, and households in eastern Kentucky's hollows and narrow valleys need a real flash flood evacuation plan given how quickly water can rise in that terrain, regardless of whether a location has flooded before.

Sources

- December 2021 Western Kentucky tornado deaths, path, and Mayfield impact: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS

- July 2022 Eastern Kentucky floods deaths, rainfall, and damage: NWS Jackson, KY; CNN

Kentucky: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: legally the landowner’s own water

Kentucky’s approach to rainwater is unusually explicit for a state without a dedicated harvesting statute: it’s addressed directly through the state’s definition of diffused surface water.

Rule	Kentucky
Source water	Rooftop or other catchment
Legal status	"Diffused surface water which flows vagrantly over the surface of the ground shall not be regarded as public water, and the owner of the land on which such water falls or flows shall have the right to its use" (KRS 151.120)
Permit required	No, for typical residential non-potable systems
Permitted uses	Irrigation, gardening, livestock, outdoor cleaning
Potable use	Only if it meets specific quality requirements set by the local health department

Where to find it: the Kentucky Division of Water administers water rights and any larger withdrawal permitting.

Water rights: riparian, with a statutory permit system for larger withdrawals

Kentucky follows the riparian reasonable-use doctrine, layered with a statutory permitting system for larger uses.

Concept	How it works in Kentucky
Who holds the right	Landowners whose property abuts a watercourse
Governing principle	Reasonable use, without unreasonably interfering with other riparian owners' access
Larger withdrawals	Require a permit under Kentucky's statutory water withdrawal permitting system

Where to find it: the Kentucky Division of Water administers withdrawal permits.

Concealed carry: permitless since 2019, with a brand-new 2026 change for younger adults

Kentucky has allowed permitless carry since July 1, 2019, and a significant change specifically affecting 18-to-20-year-olds took effect in mid-2026.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	Permitless ("constitutional") carry, open or concealed, for anyone 21+ legally eligible to possess a firearm
Optional CCDW license	Requires a state-approved firearms training course; useful for reciprocity in states that don't recognize Kentucky's permitless carry
New provisional license for 18-20 year olds	Effective July 15, 2026 (HB312, enacted via veto override on April 14, 2026), 18-to-20-year-olds can obtain a provisional license meeting the same training and background-check standards as the standard license, automatically converting to a full license at 21

A very recent change worth double-checking

This provisional license program only took effect in mid-2026, shortly before this page was written. If you’re an 18-to-20-year-old Kentucky resident, confirm current application details directly with Kentucky State Police rather than relying solely on secondary sources, since a newly implemented program’s practical details can shift in its first months.

Sources

- Kentucky rainwater harvesting and diffused surface water statute (KRS 151.120): The Land Geek
- Kentucky riparian water rights and withdrawal permitting: Texas Real Food

- Kentucky permitless carry and 2026 provisional license law (HB312): Kentucky State Police CCDW; Gunvera

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Kentucky: Local Resources

KYEM and Ready for Anything

Kentucky Emergency Management runs public preparedness outreach under the “Ready for Anything” name, centered on building a family emergency plan with a designated meeting place and clear communication procedures.

Where to find it: kyem.ky.gov/plan-prepare.

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

The University of Kentucky’s Cooperative Extension runs the same category of program as every other state covered on this site, marking 50 years in Kentucky as of 2023.

- **Kentucky Extension Master Gardener Program:** 40 hours of volunteer service to earn initial certification, then 20 hours annually to maintain it, with more than 1,100 active Master Gardener volunteers statewide.

Where to find it: kyemg.wordpress.com lists the program by county Extension office.

CERT: county-run, including Lexington’s own branded program

Kentucky’s CERT programs are organized at the county level, with Lexington running its own specifically branded version.

A distinctive local program

Lexington’s CERT effort operates under the “Be Ready Lexington” name, one of the more distinctly branded local CERT programs covered on this site, alongside county programs like Daviess County’s.

Where to find it: bereadylexington.com/cert in Lexington; search “[your county] CERT” elsewhere in the state.

Sources

- KYEM Ready for Anything campaign: Kentucky Emergency Management
- Kentucky Extension Master Gardener Program scale and requirements: UK College of Agriculture
- Kentucky CERT program examples: Be Ready Lexington; Daviess County

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Kentucky: 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 Western Kentucky tornado (December 2021)

Metric	Figure
Kentucky deaths	57
Kentucky injuries	515+
Peak rating	EF4
Path length	165.7 mi
Maximum width	2,600 yd (~1.5 mi)
Peak winds	190 mph
Graves County (Mayfield) deaths	24
National ranking	Deadliest tornado in Kentucky history; deadliest U.S. tornado during the month of December

A single tornado within a larger outbreak

This tornado was part of a broader outbreak that also struck Arkansas, Illinois, and Tennessee the same night, causing more than 90 deaths and \$3.9 billion in damage across all affected states combined. The Kentucky-specific figures above cover the Western Kentucky tornado itself, not the full multi-state outbreak total.

The Eastern Kentucky floods (July 2022)

Metric	Figure
Deaths	43-45 (rose over subsequent months as some victims later died from flood-related health complications)
Homes damaged or destroyed	~9,000
Damage estimate	\$450-950 million
Peak rainfall over a few days	14-16 in
Rainfall intensity at times	4+ in/hour
Helicopter rescues	600+
Counties declared federal disaster areas	13

The flooding was driven by “training” storms, slow-moving thunderstorm cells that repeatedly crossed the same ground rather than moving through quickly, concentrating extreme rainfall totals over a small area. Eastern Kentucky’s narrow hollows and steep terrain then turned that rainfall into fast-rising flash floods with very little warning time.

What these two have in common

Separated by seven months and hundreds of miles, the Western Kentucky tornado and the Eastern Kentucky floods demonstrate that severe weather risk in this state isn’t confined to one region or one season: a record-setting tornado struck in December, historically outside peak tornado season, and a historic flood struck a region not traditionally associated with the state’s most severe flooding.

Sources

- December 2021 Western Kentucky tornado data: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS; Tornado outbreak of December 10-11, 2021
- July 2022 Eastern Kentucky floods data: NWS Jackson, KY; CNN