

Massachusetts: Overview

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

The Worcester tornado: the deadliest in New England history

On June 9, 1953, an F4 tornado tore through Worcester and surrounding towns, staying on the ground for 78 minutes across 48 miles, killing 94 people and leaving roughly 10,000 homeless. It remains the deadliest tornado ever recorded in New England, a region most people don't associate with serious tornado risk at all. See the Risks page for the full data.

The Blizzard of 1978: a three-day siege that shut down the state

Twenty-five years later, a very different kind of storm defined Massachusetts's severe-weather history: a nor'easter that dropped 27.1 inches of snow on Boston over nearly 33 hours, killed 54 people statewide, and left roughly 10,000 residents in emergency shelters after more than 2,500 homes were effectively destroyed. Massachusetts was functionally shut down for the better part of a week.

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 Massachusetts: households need a real severe-weather plan that covers both ends of the spectrum, a practiced tornado shelter plan for summer thunderstorm season and genuine multi-day winter-storm self-sufficiency (heat, food, water, and a plan that doesn't assume roads will be passable) for nor'easter season, rather than treating either as the state's "main" risk to the exclusion of the other.

Sources

- 1953 Worcester tornado deaths, path, and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS; Blue Hill Observatory

- 1978 Blizzard deaths, snowfall, and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS and contemporary reporting; New England Historical Society

Massachusetts: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: legal and encouraged

Massachusetts places no meaningful state-level restriction on residential rainwater harvesting for non-potable use, and actively promotes it as part of its water conservation policy.

Rule	Massachusetts
Source water	Rooftop or other catchment
Permit required	No, for typical residential non-potable systems
Permitted uses	Non-potable: irrigation, and graywater-style reuse where applicable
Larger withdrawals	Governed separately under the Water Management Act, not the rainwater rules

Where to find it: the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (mass.gov/dep) publishes water conservation guidance.

Water rights: riparian reasonable use, with a state permit layer for larger withdrawals

Massachusetts follows the standard riparian reasonable-use doctrine, but pairs it with a more active state permitting system than several other riparian states covered on this site.

Concept	How it works in Massachusetts
Who holds the right	Owners of land bordering a natural watercourse
Governing principle	Reasonable use, weighed against the purpose, economic and social value, and potential harm to other riparian owners
Larger withdrawals	The Water Management Act requires a permit for significant water withdrawals
Smaller groundwater withdrawals	A 2014 amendment to the Act created a separate, lighter-touch permitting program specifically for small groundwater withdrawals

Where to find it: the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection administers Water Management Act permits.

Concealed carry: a License to Carry with a discretionary suitability standard

Massachusetts requires a License to Carry Firearms (LTC), and its licensing authorities apply a “suitability” determination that gives them real discretion, a meaningfully different structure from the purely objective shall-issue systems covered on most other states’ pages.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	The local licensing authority must determine the applicant is a "suitable person," on top of meeting the objective statutory criteria
Training required	A Massachusetts-certified Basic Firearms Safety course
Process	Background check, fingerprinting, and an in-person interview
Cost	\$100, non-refundable (no charge for renewal at age 70+)
Training update	New firearms safety course requirements, including a live-fire component, take effect for applications submitted on or after April 2, 2026

Where this sits relative to the other states covered so far

The explicit “suitable person” discretionary standard puts Massachusetts’s LTC process closer to New York’s and New Jersey’s end of the spectrum than to the shall-issue systems in states like Pennsylvania or North Carolina, though all of these states’ discretionary standards have been narrowed somewhat by post-*Bruen* federal court rulings. Confirm current status with your local licensing authority rather than assuming full discretion still applies unchanged.

Sources

- Massachusetts rainwater harvesting and Water Management Act: LegalClarity; State Regs Today
- Massachusetts LTC requirements and 2026 training changes: Alien Gear Holsters; MW Peterson Law

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Massachusetts: Local Resources

MEMA and Ready Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency runs public outreach through the Ready Massachusetts (#ReadyMA) campaign, built around four core messages: stay informed and sign up for alerts, make a plan, build a kit, and get involved in community preparedness. Materials are available in seven languages.

Where to find it: mass.gov/ready.

Master Gardeners: the one state covered here where this isn't run through Extension

Every other state covered on this site runs its Master Gardener program through the official state land-grant Extension service. Massachusetts is the exception.

What actually happened here

UMass Extension's own Master Gardener program ended in 1989 due to funding cuts. Rather than disappearing, a group of program graduates organized independently and kept it going, and regional volunteer associations, the Western Massachusetts Master Gardener Association among them, now run Master Gardener training and certification across the state outside the university system entirely. Hours and structure vary by regional association, typically in the 40-75 hour range for both training and first-year volunteer service.

Where to find it: search "[your region] Master Gardener Association" (for example, the Western Massachusetts or Cape Cod associations) for a program near you; UMass still offers a separate Horticulture Certificate Program through its University Without Walls, a related but distinct credential.

CERT: one of the largest networks covered on this site

Massachusetts has more than 160 registered CERT teams statewide, coordinated by MEMA, which also runs a “CERT Rodeo” event to give volunteers hands-on practice and connect teams across the state.

Where to find it: mass.gov/mema lists CERT program information; search “[your city/town] CERT” for a specific local team.

Sources

- MEMA Ready Massachusetts campaign structure: [Mass.gov](https://mass.gov); MEMA preparedness toolkit
- Massachusetts Master Gardener program history and current independent structure: Western Massachusetts Master Gardener Association
- Massachusetts CERT program scale and MEMA’s CERT Rodeo: [Mass.gov](https://mass.gov)

Massachusetts: 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 Worcester tornado (1953): the deadliest in New England history

Metric	Figure
Deaths	94
Injuries	1,288
Peak rating	F4
Path length	48 mi
Time on the ground	78 min
Buildings damaged or destroyed	~4,000
People left homeless	~10,000
Damage (1953 dollars / 2023-adjusted)	\$52.2 million / ~\$590 million

The tornado’s most concentrated toll came in a single minute: 60 of its 94 deaths occurred within Worcester itself as the storm clipped the northern part of Lake Quinsigamond on its way toward Shrewsbury.

The Blizzard of 1978: a three-day siege

Metric	Figure
Massachusetts deaths	54
Northeast-wide deaths	~100
Injuries (Northeast-wide)	~4,500
Boston snowfall total	27.1 in
Storm duration	32 hrs, 40 min
Massachusetts damage (1978 dollars / 2025-adjusted)	\$500 million / ~\$2.57 billion
Homes effectively destroyed	2,500+
People sheltered	~10,000

Why the death toll was so high for a snowstorm

Many of the blizzard’s deaths came from causes specific to a prolonged, disorienting storm rather than the cold alone: some victims were electrocuted by downed power lines, others became lost or trapped in snowbanks near their own vehicles and weren’t found for weeks. This is part of why this manual treats winter storm planning as more than just staying warm, visibility, downed-line awareness, and not attempting to travel matter just as much.

What these two have in common

Separated by 25 years, the Worcester tornado and the Blizzard of 1978 demonstrate that Massachusetts carries two of the most severe possible expressions of ordinary New England weather, an early-summer thunderstorm that produced the region’s deadliest tornado on record, and a routine winter nor’easter pattern that, under the right conditions, became one of the most catastrophic storms the Northeast has ever recorded.

Sources

- 1953 Worcester tornado death toll, path, and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS; Blue Hill Observatory

- 1978 Blizzard death toll, snowfall, and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS and contemporary reporting; New England Historical Society