

Oklahoma: Overview

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

Moore, Oklahoma: struck by two EF5 tornadoes, 14 years apart

On May 3, 1999, an F5 tornado tore through Bridge Creek, Newcastle, and Moore, and mobile Doppler radar recorded winds as high as 321 mph inside it, the highest wind speed ever measured on Earth. The storm killed 36 people directly and caused roughly \$1 billion in damage. Fourteen years later, on May 20, 2013, another EF5 tornado struck the same city of Moore directly, killing 24 people, including 7 children sheltering at Plaza Towers Elementary School when a wall collapsed. See the Risks page for the full data on both.

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 Oklahoma: a genuine, practiced tornado shelter plan, an underground storm shelter or a specifically identified interior room, isn't optional preparedness here, it's a response to documented, repeated, top-of-scale tornado risk in the same communities. Moore's experience shows that being hit by history's most extreme tornado doesn't make a location safe from the next one.

Sources

- 1999 Bridge Creek-Moore tornado wind speed record, deaths, and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS and NSSL; NOAA NSSL
- 2013 Moore tornado deaths, Plaza Towers Elementary, and damage: NIST; Fox Weather

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Oklahoma: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: no dedicated state statute, generally unrestricted

Oklahoma doesn’t have a specific law addressing residential rainwater harvesting one way or the other, which in practice means typical small-scale collection isn’t regulated.

Rule	Oklahoma
Source water	Rooftop or other catchment
Permit required	No dedicated state requirement for typical residential rain barrels
Permitted uses	Non-potable: irrigation and similar uses
Larger surface water storage	Damming a stream to collect water is generally a "reasonable use" under riparian doctrine, unless it blocks natural flow or interferes with other riparian owners

Where to find it: the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (oklahoma.gov/owrb) administers water rights and larger permitting.

Water rights: a genuine dual system, unlike most states covered on this site

Oklahoma sits at a geographic and legal crossroads, combining elements of the riparian doctrine common in Eastern states with the prior appropriation doctrine typical of the West.

Water use	Governing doctrine in Oklahoma
Domestic use by a riparian landowner	Riparian rights, running with the land, not lost through nonuse
Most other surface water uses	Prior appropriation ("first in time, first in right"), requiring intent to use, physical diversion, and beneficial use within a reasonable time

Why this hybrid exists

Oklahoma’s location between the historically water-rich East and the arid West left it with a legal system that draws from both traditions rather than adopting one exclusively. Since 1963, new water rights claims based purely on riparian land ownership have been phased out in favor of the appropriation system for most uses beyond basic domestic needs, meaning Oklahoma has shifted increasingly toward the Western model over time while retaining riparian protection for domestic use specifically.

Where to find it: the Oklahoma Water Resources Board administers both systems.

Permitless carry since 2019, with a 2026 bill proposing a lower age floor

Oklahoma has allowed permitless carry since 2019, and a bill under consideration in 2026 would extend eligibility further.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	Permitless carry, open or concealed, for anyone 21+ legally eligible to possess a firearm
Optional Self-Defense Act (SDA) License	8-hour safety and law course with live-fire qualification through an OSBI-certified instructor; \$100 for 5 years, \$200 for 10 years
Proposed 2026 change	Senate Bill 1698 would extend permitless carry and transport eligibility to anyone 18 or older, removing the current military-service exception requirement for that age group

Confirm current status

As of this writing, SB 1698 is proposed legislation, not enacted law; the 21-year minimum for permitless carry remains in effect unless and until it passes. Check current status before relying on an 18-year floor.

Sources

- Oklahoma water rights dual system: Oklahoma State University Extension; League of Women Voters Tulsa
- Oklahoma permitless carry and SDA license: Oklahoma OSBI; Protect With Bear

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Oklahoma: Local Resources

Oklahoma Emergency Management (OEM)

OEM coordinates the state's preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation programs, without a single named consumer-facing campaign the way some other states covered on this site have.

A distinctive program for younger residents

Since 2019, Oklahoma has run a Youth Preparedness Council in partnership with local emergency managers, tribes, volunteer agencies, and FEMA Region 6, specifically designed to build emergency preparedness knowledge and leadership skills in young Oklahomans, a program not seen on any other state's page covered so far.

Where to find it: oklahoma.gov/oem/programs-and-services.html.

OSU Extension: Oklahoma's version of the other states' land-grant Extension programs

Oklahoma State University Extension runs the same category of program as every other state covered on this site.

- **Oklahoma Master Gardener Program:** classroom training coordinated by local county Extension offices, followed by 60 hours of certification service (48 hours at the Master Gardener help desk, 12 hours in the Demonstration and Teaching Garden), then 20 volunteer hours and 10 continuing-education hours annually to maintain it.

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

CERT: including Moore's own program

Oklahoma's CERT programs are organized locally, and the City of Moore, itself the site of two EF5 tornadoes, runs its own Community Emergency Response Training program directly.

Where to find it: oklahoma.gov/homeland-security/training/cert for statewide information; the City of Moore (cityofmoore.com) for its own program specifically.

Sources

- Oklahoma Emergency Management programs and Youth Preparedness Council: Oklahoma.gov OEM
- OSU Extension Master Gardener Program requirements: OSU Extension
- Oklahoma CERT program and City of Moore's own program: Oklahoma.gov; City of Moore

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Oklahoma: 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 Bridge Creek-Moore tornado (1999): the highest wind speed ever recorded on Earth

Metric	Figure
Peak rating	F5
Peak measured wind speed	321 mph $\pm$ 20 mph (revised upward from an initial 1999 measurement of 301 mph in a 2021 reanalysis)
Measurement method	Mobile Doppler radar (Doppler on Wheels), University of Oklahoma
Direct deaths	36
Indirect deaths	5
Injuries	583
Path length	38 mi
Duration	1 hr 25 min
Damage (1999 dollars / 2025-adjusted)	\$1 billion / ~\$1.9 billion

Why the record wind speed figure changed

The originally reported 301 mph measurement was revised to 321 mph following a 2021 scientific reanalysis of the original radar data, with a stated margin of error of $\pm$ 20 mph either way. This still stands as the highest wind speed ever measured inside a tornado, or anywhere on Earth, by direct instrumentation.

The Moore tornado (2013): the same city, an EF5 again

Metric	Figure
Peak rating	EF5
Deaths	24 (7 children at Plaza Towers Elementary)
Injuries	377
Peak width	~0.5 mi
Peak winds	~200 mph
Buildings damaged or destroyed	~2,400, including two elementary schools and Moore's only hospital
Damage estimate	\$2-3.5 billion (estimates varied widely in the weeks after the event)

Nine of the tornado’s deaths, beyond the 7 at Plaza Towers, occurred in eight different homes within a quarter mile of the school, concentrated in the same immediate area.

What these two have in common

The two Moore tornadoes, separated by 14 years, demonstrate that Oklahoma’s most extreme tornado risk isn’t randomly distributed, certain corridors within Tornado Alley, Moore among them, have now been struck by top-of-scale tornadoes more than once within a single generation. That history is a direct argument for permanent storm shelter infrastructure rather than treating a single close call as reason enough to feel safe going forward.

Sources

- 1999 Bridge Creek-Moore tornado wind speed, deaths, and damage: Wikipedia, sourced to NWS and NSSL; NOAA NSSL
- 2013 Moore tornado deaths, damage, and Plaza Towers Elementary data: NIST; Insurance Journal