

Pennsylvania: Overview

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

A landlocked state, but not a hurricane-free one

Pennsylvania doesn't take direct hurricane landfalls, it's nowhere near the coast, but that doesn't make it immune to hurricanes. A weakening tropical system's remnant moisture can still dump enormous rainfall on the state's river basins in a matter of hours, and Pennsylvania's hilly terrain and dense network of rivers turn that rain into flash flooding fast. Hurricane Agnes did exactly that in June 1972, killing 50 people in Pennsylvania and causing \$2.3 billion in damage, the governor at the time called it, without qualification, the worst disaster in Pennsylvania's history. The mechanism repeated on a smaller scale in September 2021, when the remnants of Hurricane Ida pushed Philadelphia's Schuylkill River to heights not seen in over 150 years.

What makes this risk easy to underestimate

Because Pennsylvania isn't in any conventional hurricane risk zone, it's easy to treat hurricane season as somebody else's problem. The data says otherwise: the state's worst disaster on record was a hurricane's remnants, not an earthquake, wildfire, or blizzard, and it happened specifically because a weakened tropical system stalled over the state's river basins rather than passing through quickly. See the Risks page for the full comparison between 1972 and 2021.

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 Pennsylvania: households anywhere near a river, not just the obvious floodplain, should treat remnant tropical moisture as a real flash flood risk during hurricane season (June through November), and this is true statewide, not just in coastal-adjacent counties the way it is in most other states covered on this site.

Sources

- Hurricane Agnes deaths, damage, and evacuation figures in Pennsylvania: Wikipedia, sourced to NOAA and contemporary reporting; Fox Weather
- Hurricane Ida remnants' Pennsylvania rainfall and Schuylkill River crest: USGS; NPR

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Pennsylvania: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: permitted statewide, subsidized in Philadelphia

Pennsylvania places no state-level restriction on collecting rainwater for non-potable use, and Philadelphia specifically goes further than any other city covered on this site by directly funding it.

Rule	Pennsylvania
Source water	Rooftop or other on-property catchment
Permit required	No, for typical residential non-potable use
Permitted uses	Non-potable: irrigation, washing; drinking untreated collected rainwater is not permitted
Underlying framework	No specific state harvesting statute; governed under the broader Pennsylvania Storm Water Management Act of 1978 (Act 167), which sets the stormwater-management framework counties and municipalities build local ordinances on

Philadelphia will give you a rain barrel

The Philadelphia Water Department runs free workshops and gives away free rain barrels to residents, and the city offers stormwater grants and low-interest loans for larger nature-based stormwater projects on non-residential properties. This is a genuinely different posture from every other state covered so far, direct public funding for the exact behavior this manual’s water chapter already recommends, not just an absence of restriction.

Where to find it: the Philadelphia Water Department (water.phila.gov) for city-specific programs; the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (dep.pa.gov) for statewide stormwater policy.

Water rights: riparian, same family as Florida and New York, with an explicit priority rule

Pennsylvania uses the same broad riparian reasonable-use doctrine as Florida and New York, but its case law spells out an explicit priority order that those two states’ pages didn’t need to cover.

Concept	How it works in Pennsylvania
Who holds the right	Riparian owners: landowners bordering a watercourse
Governing principle	Reasonable use: some reduction in flow is allowed as long as other riparian users aren't unreasonably harmed; "reasonable" depends on stream size, use type, withdrawal amount, and other users' circumstances
Nature of the right	Usufructuary: a right to use the water, not to own it outright
Priority in a conflict	Domestic use (drinking, bathing, livestock, laundry) is explicitly given top priority over all other uses when riparian users conflict
Prohibited uses	Selling or wasting water, and diverting it to non-riparian land, are both treated as unreasonable regardless of amount

Where to find it: the Pennsylvania DEP’s Bureau of Safe Drinking Water handles larger water allocation questions; Penn State Extension (extension.psu.edu) publishes a plain-language overview of riparian rights for property owners.

Concealed carry: shall-issue, and the simplest process covered here so far

Pennsylvania requires a license to carry concealed, unlike Utah, Texas, and Florida’s permitless systems, but its process is the least demanding shall-issue system covered on this site, notably simpler than California’s or New York’s.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	Shall-issue: the county Sheriff must issue a License to Carry Firearms (LTCF) to any applicant who meets the statutory criteria
Training required	None; Pennsylvania is one of the few shall-issue states with no mandatory training or live-fire component at all
Minimum age	21
Cost and validity	\$20, valid for 5 years
Processing time	Up to 45 days by law

Where Pennsylvania sits on the spectrum

Across the six states covered so far, this section runs from fully permitless (Utah, Texas, Florida) through Pennsylvania’s no-training shall-issue system, to California’s shall-issue system with a mandatory 16-hour course, to New York’s much more demanding “good moral character” standard with an 18-hour requirement and an active interview and background investigation. Pennsylvania sits closer to the permitless end than either California or New York.

Sources

- Pennsylvania rainwater harvesting rules and Philadelphia incentive programs: Pennsylvania-State.blog; Philadelphia Water Department; Act 167 framework: StormwaterPA
- Pennsylvania riparian water rights, reasonable use, and domestic-use priority: Penn State Extension; MPL Law Firm
- Pennsylvania License to Carry Firearms requirements: CCW Hub; Alien Gear Holsters

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Pennsylvania: Local Resources

PEMA and ReadyPA

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency runs public preparedness outreach under the ReadyPA campaign, built on the national Ready.gov framework from DHS and the Ad Council but adapted with Pennsylvania-specific content.

ReadyPA's three-part framework

Be Informed (know your specific local hazards and how to get emergency alerts), Be Prepared (build a kit and a household plan), and Be Involved (volunteer, including through your local CERT team or Citizen Corps). ReadyPA is supported jointly by PEMA, Citizen Corps of Pennsylvania, and the state Department of Health.

Where to find it: pa.gov/agencies/ready.

Penn State Extension: Pennsylvania's version of USU/OSU/UC ANR/AgriLife/UF IFAS/Cornell CCE

Penn State Extension runs the same category of land-grant Extension program as every other state covered on this site.

- **Master Gardener Program:** 40 hours of basic training (many counties run it as a 20-week evening program, October through March), an 80%-or-better score on midterm and final exams, then 50 hours of volunteer service within the first year to earn certification, followed by 20 volunteer hours and 10 continuing-education hours annually to maintain it.

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

CERT: county-run, with PEMA offering a direct connection

Like most states covered on this site outside of a few large single-city programs, Pennsylvania's CERT teams are organized at the county level, Allegheny County (Pittsburgh), Chester County, and Montgomery County among the active examples, each with its own schedule and application process.

A shortcut worth knowing about

Rather than searching independently, Pennsylvania residents can contact PEMA directly and ask to be connected to their local CERT team, a small but genuinely useful coordination service that not every state covered here offers explicitly.

Where to find it: pa.gov/services/ready for the PEMA connection point; Pittsburgh and Chester County for two active county-level examples.

Sources

- PEMA and ReadyPA campaign structure: Ready PA; ReadyPA newsletter/background
- Penn State Extension Master Gardener Program training and certification requirements: Penn State Extension
- Pennsylvania CERT program structure and PEMA's local connection service: [PA.gov](https://pa.gov); Allegheny County

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Pennsylvania: 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.

Hurricane Agnes (1972): the worst disaster in Pennsylvania’s recorded history

Metric	Figure
Pennsylvania deaths	50
Pennsylvania damage (1972 dollars)	\$2.3 billion
People evacuated statewide	100,000+
People left homeless statewide	220,000+
Homes and businesses damaged or destroyed	68,000 homes / 3,000+ businesses
U.S.-wide deaths (for comparison)	119

Why Pennsylvania's share of this disaster was so disproportionate

Agnes made its actual landfall on the Florida Panhandle and had weakened to a tropical depression by the time it reached Pennsylvania, but it stalled over the state’s river basins for days, dumping enormous rainfall on already-saturated ground. Pennsylvania’s share of the storm’s total U.S. damage was larger than every other affected state combined; then-Governor Milton Shapp called it, without qualification, the worst disaster in Pennsylvania’s history. The lesson isn’t about hurricane category or landfall strength, it’s about a weakened system’s rainfall meeting a river basin’s terrain.

Hurricane Ida remnants (2021): the same mechanism, half a century later

Metric	Figure
Pennsylvania deaths	5+
Rainfall, eastern/south-central PA	5-10 in, most within about 6 hours
Schuylkill River crest in Philadelphia	Highest level in more than 150 years
Pennsylvania damage estimate	\$117 million+

Ida’s Pennsylvania toll was far smaller than Agnes’s in absolute terms, but the mechanism was identical: a tropical system, by then a post-tropical remnant, dropped its rainfall over a short window directly onto a Pennsylvania river basin, and the Schuylkill responded by rising to a height the city hadn’t seen in a century and a half.

What these two have in common

Separated by 49 years, Agnes and Ida demonstrate the same structural risk: Pennsylvania doesn’t need a hurricane to make landfall on its own soil to suffer a landmark flood disaster, it only needs a weakening tropical system to stall its rain over the right river basin. That’s a very different risk profile from every coastal state covered on this site, and it means hurricane season matters in Pennsylvania even though no hurricane has ever technically made landfall there.

Sources

- Hurricane Agnes Pennsylvania death toll, damage, and evacuation figures: Wikipedia, sourced to NOAA and contemporary reporting; Fox Weather; Susquehanna River Basin Commission
- Hurricane Ida remnants’ Pennsylvania deaths, rainfall, and Schuylkill River crest: USGS; NPR