

Rhode Island: Overview

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

The Hurricane of 1938: downtown Providence under 13 feet of water

On September 21, 1938, a hurricane that struck with almost no warning devastated Rhode Island. Connecticut and New Hampshire's pages on this site cover the storm's broader Southern New England death toll; in Rhode Island specifically, an estimated 229 people died. Providence recorded sustained winds of 100 mph, gusting to 125, and a storm surge rushed into the harbor and submerged downtown Providence under more than 13 feet of water. Narragansett Bay took the worst of the surge, 12-15 feet, destroying most coastal homes, marinas, and yacht clubs, and in Jamestown, seven children died when their school bus was blown into Mackerel Cove. See the Risks page for the full data.

The March 2010 floods: the worst in 200-plus years

Over three days in late March 2010, Rhode Island received nearly 16 inches of rain, a rainfall total classified as a 1-in-100-year event, producing what officials called the worst flooding the state had seen in more than two centuries. The Pawtuxet River crested 13 feet above flood stage, and the Warwick and Rhode Island malls sat partially submerged for days. Remarkably, the flooding itself caused no direct deaths, though one indirect traffic fatality occurred during the storm. See the Risks page for the full data.

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 Rhode Island: coastal storm surge here has a documented history of submerging an entire downtown, not just low-lying edges, so evacuation planning for Providence and Narragansett Bay communities should account for that scale, and the 2010 flood shows that a state this size can absorb a historic, multi-day rain event with strong emergency response and still avoid a mass-casualty outcome, a genuine success story worth noting alongside the manual's warning-and-evacuation guidance.

Sources

- Hurricane of 1938 Rhode Island data: What's Going On In Rhode Island; Small State Big History
- March 2010 Rhode Island flood data: WPRI; ecoRI News

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Rhode Island: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: legal, encouraged, and subsidized

Rhode Island doesn’t just permit rainwater harvesting, it offers a direct tax incentive for installing a cistern, a step beyond Pennsylvania’s Philadelphia-specific rain-barrel subsidies covered elsewhere on this site.

Rule	Rhode Island
Source water	Rooftop or other catchment
Permit required	No, at the state level
State incentive	10% income tax credit, up to \$1,000, for installing a cistern to collect rainwater for home or business use (RIGL §44-30-28)

Where to find it: the Rhode Island Division of Taxation administers the cistern tax credit.

Water rights: riparian reasonable-use

Rhode Island follows riparian doctrine: property owners may use water from a source on or adjacent to their land, limited by the reasonable-use standard when that use would interfere with downstream owners.

Concept	How it works in Rhode Island
Basic rule	A riparian landowner may reasonably use adjacent water so long as it doesn't unreasonably interfere with other riparian landowners downstream
How reasonableness is judged	By comparing the proposed use against other riparian landowners' own uses of the same source

Where to find it: the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management administers water-related regulation.

Concealed carry: one of the most restrictive and inconsistent systems covered on this site

Rhode Island runs a genuinely unusual hybrid: two separate issuing authorities with two different standards, producing inconsistent access depending on which one an applicant goes through.

Path	Standard
Local police chief/sheriff	Shall-issue: must grant a permit to anyone 21+ who is a citizen or legal resident, passes a background check, completes mandatory safety training, and undergoes a mental health evaluation
Attorney General	May-issue: requires a 'proper showing of need,' interpreted strictly in practice, generally limited to a documented specific threat, a security-related job, or former law enforcement status

Two paths to the same permit, two very different odds

Because Rhode Island lets both local authorities and the Attorney General issue carry permits under different legal standards, two applicants with identical backgrounds can face very different odds of approval depending purely on which office they apply through. No other state covered on this site splits carry-permit authority this way.

Sources

- Rhode Island rainwater harvesting tax credit: NTO Tank
- Rhode Island riparian reasonable-use water law: Wikipedia
- Rhode Island’s hybrid shall-issue/may-issue carry system: Rhode Island Attorney General’s Office; D’Ellison Law

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Rhode Island: Local Resources

Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA)

RIEMA provides technical assistance and support directly to municipalities and qualified non-governmental organizations building disaster response capability, covering planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercises.

Where to find it: riema.ri.gov.

URI Extension: Master Gardener Program

University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension runs the same category of program as every other state covered on this site, active since 1977.

- **URI Master Gardener Program:** after completing core training, participants become “Interns,” then must complete 50 hours of volunteer service on an approved project to earn full “URI Extension Master Gardener” certification.

Where to find it: web.uri.edu/coopext/programs/mgp.

CERT: RIEMA-supported, municipality by municipality

Rhode Island’s CERT program is delivered through RIEMA’s direct technical assistance to individual municipalities, covering disaster preparedness, fire suppression, medical operations, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster simulation exercises.

Support from the state, delivery at the local level

RIEMA’s role is to help each municipality build and maintain its own trained CERT cadre, not to run one single statewide team. Coverage still depends on whether your specific municipality has built out its program with that support.

Where to find it: riema.ri.gov, or your municipality's emergency management office.

Sources

- RIEMA structure and CERT support model: Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency
- URI Master Gardener Program history and requirements: University of Rhode Island

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Rhode Island: 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 Hurricane of 1938

Metric	Figure
Date	September 21, 1938
Rhode Island deaths	~229 (estimate)
Providence sustained winds/gusts	100 mph sustained, gusting to 125 mph
Providence storm surge	13+ ft, submerging downtown
Narragansett Bay storm surge	12-15 ft, destroying most coastal homes, marinas, and yacht clubs
Notable single loss	7 children killed in Jamestown when their school bus was blown into Mackerel Cove
Power outage duration	Several weeks in some areas

A regional storm, a state-specific toll

Connecticut’s and New Hampshire’s pages on this site cover this same storm’s broader 564-682 Southern New England death toll. Rhode Island’s ~229 estimate is this state’s specific share of that regional total, not a separate event.

The March 2010 floods

Metric	Figure
Dates	Late March 2010, over 3 days
Rainfall	~16 in
Statistical classification	1-in-100-year rainfall event
Pawtuxet River crest	13 ft above flood stage, 20.79 ft total
Deaths	0 direct; 1 indirect (a traffic fatality during the storm)
Disaster assistance applications	26,000+ Rhode Islanders
Federal disaster assistance	\$79 million
Historical ranking	The worst flooding the state had experienced in more than 200 years

A historic flood without a mass-casualty outcome

Unlike many of the acute disasters covered on this site, Rhode Island's 2010 flood caused zero direct deaths despite being officially the worst flood in over two centuries. That combination, historic severity without a matching death toll, is a genuine credit to the state's warning and response systems, in the same category as Minnesota's 1997 flood and Iowa's 2008 flood covered elsewhere on this site.

Sources

- Hurricane of 1938 Rhode Island data: What's Going On In Rhode Island; Small State Big History
- March 2010 Rhode Island flood data: WPRI; ecoRI News