

South Carolina: Overview

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

Hurricane Hugo: record storm tides on the East Coast

Hurricane Hugo made landfall just north of Charleston at Sullivan's Island around midnight on September 22, 1989, as a Category 4 storm with winds of 135-140 mph. It killed 35 people in South Carolina and caused \$7 billion in damage, and the storm surge at McClellanville reached more than 20 feet, the highest storm tides ever recorded along the East Coast up to that point. See the Risks page for the full data.

The 2015 floods: a statistical 1-in-1,000-year rainfall event

In October 2015, a slow-moving storm system dropped rainfall so extreme that several areas of the state, Columbia among them, met the statistical threshold for a 1-in-1,000-year event, with Columbia recording 17 inches of rain in just 17 hours on its wettest day on record. The flooding killed 19 people, nearly 50 dams failed or were breached statewide, and emergency crews conducted more than 1,500 water 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 South Carolina: coastal households need real hurricane evacuation planning that accounts for storm surge specifically, not just wind, and households anywhere near a dam or in a floodplain should know that a "1,000-year" rainfall statistic describes probability, not a guarantee of infrequency, South Carolina has already experienced one.

Sources

- Hurricane Hugo deaths, damage, and storm surge: National Weather Service; National Academies Press

- 2015 South Carolina floods, rainfall, and death toll: NOAA Climate.gov; NWS Service Assessment

South Carolina: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: legal, with a specific storage cap

South Carolina permits rainwater harvesting under its Water Resources Act, with a defined numeric storage limit for typical residential systems, unlike the volume-agnostic rules in many other states covered on this site.

Rule	South Carolina
Source water	Above-ground rooftop surfaces
Permitted uses	Non-potable: irrigation, lawn care, vehicle washing
Storage cap	2,500 gallons for a single-family residence, unless a local municipality adopts a stricter ordinance
Underlying statute	South Carolina Water Resources Act

Where to find it: the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (now part of the state’s reorganized environmental agencies) publishes rooftop collection guidance; check local ordinances for any stricter caps.

Water rights: standard riparian doctrine

South Carolina follows the traditional riparian rights system derived from English common law, the same general framework as most Southeastern states covered on this site.

Concept	How it works in South Carolina
Who holds the right	Landowners along a river or stream
Governing principle	Reasonable use of water bordering or flowing through the property

Where to find it: the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (formerly DHEC’s environmental functions) administers water rights and larger withdrawal permits.

Permitless carry since March 2024, at age 18

South Carolina became a permitless-carry state effective March 7, 2024, one of the more recent states to adopt the policy, and set its minimum age at 18 rather than 21.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	Permitless carry, open or concealed, effective March 7, 2024
Minimum age	18
Optional Concealed Weapons Permit (CWP)	8 hours of state-approved training, \$50 fee through SLED, valid 5 years, \$50 renewal
Why get the optional CWP anyway	Useful for reciprocity in states that require a permit from South Carolina residents

An age threshold worth noting

South Carolina’s 18-year permitless carry age matches Missouri’s low end (19, or 18 with military service) more closely than the 21-year floor most other permitless states covered on this site use.

Sources

- South Carolina rainwater harvesting rules and storage cap: CityRuleLookup; AllowedHere
- South Carolina riparian water rights: University of South Carolina Law Review
- South Carolina permitless carry and optional CWP: Attorney Truslow; USA Gun Shop

South Carolina: Local Resources

SCEMD, Know Your Zone, and the SC Emergency Manager app

The South Carolina Emergency Management Division runs a specifically named hurricane evacuation campaign, Know Your Zone, alongside a general-purpose mobile app for preparedness and real-time updates during an emergency.

Why Know Your Zone matters specifically here

Given South Carolina's direct hurricane exposure, this campaign is built around a genuinely practical action: identifying your specific coastal evacuation zone and route in advance, rather than waiting to figure it out during an actual storm.

Where to find it: scemd.org/prepare; the SC Emergency Manager app is available for iPhone and Android.

Clemson Extension: South Carolina's version of the other states' land-grant Extension programs

Clemson University's Cooperative Extension runs the same category of program as every other state covered on this site.

- **South Carolina Master Gardener Program:** at least 40 hours of intensive, practical horticultural training through the Master Gardener Volunteer Training Course.

Where to find it: clemson.edu/extension/mg lists the program by county, including an online class option.

CERT: coordinated through SCEMD

South Carolina's CERT programs are coordinated through the state Emergency Management Division.

Where to find it: scemd.org/em-professionals/cert-programs-in-sc.

Sources

- SCEMD Know Your Zone campaign and SC Emergency Manager app: SCEMD; SC Living
- Clemson Extension Master Gardener Program requirements: Clemson University
- South Carolina CERT program coordination: SCEMD

South Carolina: 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 Hugo (1989): record storm tides on the East Coast

Metric	Figure
Landfall strength	Category 4, 135-140 mph
South Carolina deaths	35 (13 direct, 22 indirect, including deaths from candle-caused house fires)
Damage	\$7 billion
Homes completely destroyed	9,302 (more than half mobile homes)
Homes with major damage	26,772
Charleston peninsula sustained winds/gusts	87 mph / up to 107 mph
Storm surge at McClellanville	20+ ft, the highest East Coast storm tide recorded to that point

The 2015 floods: a 1-in-1,000-year rainfall event

Metric	Figure
Deaths	19 (9 in Richland County/Columbia)
Peak rainfall (Columbia, 17 hours)	17 in, wettest day on record
Peak rainfall, some areas	~30 in
Dams failed or breached	~50
Water rescues	1,500+
Roads/bridges closed	500+
Residents displaced	20,000+

Why the damage estimate for this event varies so widely across sources

South Carolina-specific damage estimates for the 2015 floods range from roughly \$1.5 billion to as high as \$12 billion depending on the source and what’s counted (direct property damage alone versus broader economic impact). Separately, USGS’s own post-event analysis found no clear evidence that streamflow itself reached 1,000-year-event levels at monitored gauges, even though the rainfall total met that threshold in several locations, rainfall probability and streamflow/flood discharge are related but distinct measurements, and they didn’t move in lockstep during this event.

What these two have in common

Hurricane Hugo and the 2015 floods, 26 years apart, both produced record-setting numbers by different measures, storm surge height and rainfall statistical rarity respectively, and both demonstrate that South Carolina’s combination of coastal exposure and inland river/dam infrastructure creates two genuinely distinct paths to catastrophic flooding.

Sources

- Hurricane Hugo death toll, damage, and storm surge data: National Weather Service; National Academies Press

- 2015 South Carolina floods rainfall, deaths, and infrastructure impact: NOAA Climate.gov; NWS Service Assessment
- USGS analysis of 2015 flood discharge vs. rainfall rarity: USGS