

Georgia Disaster History

Georgia regularly faces many types of natural disasters including hurricanes, tornadoes, severe storms, wildfires and floods. In addition, man-made disasters (such as terrorist attacks and transportation accidents involving hazardous materials) and disease threats (such as pandemic outbreaks) pose a threat to Georgians, as they do to all Americans. Disasters and emergencies can happen quickly and without warning, so it makes sense to prepare now.

Tornadoes

From 1950 to 2014, more than 1,500 tornadoes were reported in Georgia, including 32 in 2014. While the months of March, April and May are historically the most active period for tornado activity in the state, tornadoes can occur at any time of the year, even during winter months.

- In January 2017, two severe weather events produced 27 tornadoes across the NWS Atlanta area, the highest number of tornadoes recorded in a two-day period in the County Warning Area since records began in 1950. 41 tornadoes were recorded across the state of Georgia during the two day period, which also set a new record for a two-day period, beating the old record of 25 from September 15-16, 2004.
- In October and November of 2014, 17 tornadoes swept through the state, resulting in close to \$1 million in property and crop damage.
- In January 2013, parts of north Georgia were hit hard by an EF3 tornado, injuring 17 people.
- In March of 2012, eight tornadoes pummeled across the state over the course of three days, resulting in \$12.64 million in property and crop damage.
- Metro Atlanta was struck by a tornado during a March 2008 outbreak, causing half a billion dollars worth of damage to the city, including the CNN Center, Georgia Dome, Georgia World Congress Center and multiple downtown Atlanta buildings. In total, 45 tornadoes were confirmed over the 24-hour period from eastern Alabama to the Carolina coast, with most of the activity concentrated in the metro Atlanta area, the Central Savannah River Area and the Midlands of South Carolina.
- In March 2007, 21 tornadoes touched down in eastern, middle and southern Georgia. The storms left nine people dead, nearly 100 injured, and hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. The 143-bed Sumter Regional Hospital in Americus took a direct hit from a violent EF-3 tornado with winds of up to 165 mph. The tornado that hit the hospital was a mile wide and cut an astounding 38-mile path through Webster, Sumter and Macon counties.
- Three violent tornadoes roared through Mitchell and Worth counties in February 2000, leaving 21 people dead. Three years later, two tornadoes touched down in the same area, killing six, injuring more than 200 and damaging approximately 300 homes.

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Severe Thunderstorms and Flooding

The most common types of natural disasters in Georgia are thunderstorms that can cause widespread damage, crippling communities across the state.

- Severe storms and flooding between December 2015 and January 2016 brought federal disaster declarations to 33 counties.
- In September 2009, continuous rain caused 500-year floods that affected several counties throughout northern Georgia, most of them in and around metro Atlanta. The flood is blamed for at least 10 deaths and \$500 million worth of damage. Some 20,000 homes, businesses and other buildings suffered major damage, and 23 counties received Federal Disaster Declarations.
- A spring 2009 flood in southern Georgia brought federal disaster declarations to 46 counties.
- In 1998, severe storms brought flooding to areas across the entire state, affecting 119 counties in Georgia.

Tropical Storms and Hurricanes

Georgia is vulnerable to storms and hurricanes that form in the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

- In October 2016, Hurricane Matthew affected the Eastern coast with heavy flooding, rain and damaging winds. In the southeast, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina all faced damage. In Georgia alone, St. Simons and Jekyll Islands faced a 9-foot wall of water carrying 25-foot waves. Additional damage was caused by downed trees and flooding. Ten counties in the state received Federal Disaster Declarations and three people were killed.
- Western Georgia took a hit from Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005, with bands of heavy rains and damaging winds. A record 18 tornadoes touched down when its remnants passed through the state, killing two people and destroying numerous homes and businesses. In addition, the price of gasoline shot up dramatically, reaching as high as \$6 per gallon, due to consumer panic after oil pumps were disrupted in the Gulf of Mexico. Georgia also became the destination of more than 100,000 evacuees from the Gulf States.
- In September 1999, Georgia, along with Florida, South Carolina and North Carolina, experienced the largest evacuation effort in American history in the face of Hurricane Floyd. An estimated three million people took to the highways to flee Floyd's wrath, jamming interstates in search of safety and shelter.
- On July 4, 1994, Tropical Storm Alberto stalled over Georgia, bringing up to 25 inches of rain in less than 24 hours. Thirty-four people were killed, more than 50,000 were displaced from their homes and at least 400 coffins were forced from water-logged graves into flooded streets.

Winter Storms

Winter storms, which often affect north Georgia, result in extreme cold, downed power lines and blocked roads and highways.

- In February 2015, a strong cold front pushed across Georgia, bringing in plenty of below freezing temperatures to north Georgia. Freezing rain ranged from 1/4" to 1/2" in some areas, leading to widespread tree and power line damage. By the morning of February 17, more than 200,000 customers were without power, generally for the northeast Atlanta metro area and points north and east.
- In late January 2014, snow and ice paralyzed north and central Georgia, leaving thousands of motorists stranded in their cars—some for more than 20 hours. According to the Georgia State Patrol, there were more than 1,500 winter storm related accidents and more than 180 injuries. Just two weeks later, in early February, a more powerful storm brought heavy snow and record amounts of ice to north and central Georgia, leaving more than 200,00 Georgians without power.

- In January 2011, a single storm sent a thick layer of snow and ice that shut down transportation in parts of the state for five days, eventually affecting 70 percent of Georgia.
- In 1993, a Federal Disaster Declaration was issued after a blizzard dropped more than four inches of snow on metro Atlanta and shut down the entire region for nearly three days.

Wildfires

Wildfires spread quickly and change direction rapidly, igniting brush, trees and homes.

- On April 16, 2007, a downed power line ignited drought-parched forest floors in southern Georgia, which led to the largest and most devastating wildfires in state history. Nearly 564,000 acres were consumed in Georgia and Florida, and 18 homes were destroyed. More than 3,300 firefighters from 44 states, Canada and Puerto Rico came in to battle the blazes.

Terrorist Attacks

Georgia is at risk for terrorist attacks. While Georgia has not experienced a large-scale attack, they can occur without warning.

- In June 2009, a Georgia Tech student was convicted of conspiring to provide material support for terrorism and was sentenced to 13 years in federal prison.
- As the events of September 11, 2001, demonstrated, terrorist attacks can occur quickly and unexpectedly.
- During the 1996 Olympics, a bombing occurred at Centennial Olympic Park, killing four and injuring 111. The next year, an Atlanta-area health clinic and a gay nightclub were bombed by the same man. Eric Rudolph pled guilty to these crimes in 2005 and is now serving a life sentence in prison.

Pandemic Flu

Pandemics can spread rapidly, leaving little time to prepare once an outbreak starts.

- In June 2009, the World Health Organization declared H1N1 influenza a pandemic. Nearly 50 people died and more than 800 were hospitalized in Georgia because of the virus.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has already noted cases of avian flu in humans in the United States. Georgia ranks as the nation's leading producer of poultry products.