



STATE OF FLORIDA

DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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FLORIDA'S SEVERE WEATHER AWARENESS WEEK will take place from January 24-30, 2010. Severe Weather Awareness Week is an opportunity for Floridians to learn about the various weather hazards that frequently impact the state and how families and businesses can prepare for these natural events. Each day focuses on a specific weather event. The topics for each weekday are:

Monday, Jan. 25: Lightning

Tuesday, Jan. 26: Marine Hazards and Rip Currents

Wednesday, Jan. 27: Tornadoes and Thunderstorms

Thursday, Jan. 28: Hurricanes and Flooding

Friday, Jan. 29: Temperature Extremes and Wildfires

Florida's Severe Weather Awareness Week takes place from January 24-30, 2010. Severe Weather Awareness Week is an opportunity for Floridians to learn about the various weather hazards that frequently impact the state and how families and businesses can prepare for these natural events.

Each day focuses on a specific weather event. **Monday's focus is on lightning.**

Lightning is one of nature's deadliest and most unpredictable weather phenomena. Meteorologists can forecast the general conditions that cause lightning, but no one knows for sure exactly when and where lightning will strike.

Lightning is among the top weather-related killers in the United States, striking the ground about 25 million times each year and causing more injury and death than tornadoes.

The 2010 Florida Severe Weather Awareness Week is a perfect time to note that our state, out of all 50 states, is the lightning capital of North America. Some of the elements that make Florida such a great place to live, such as sunshine, warm temperatures and close proximity to large bodies of water, play important roles in the development of thunderstorms that produce dangerous lightning.

DID YOU KNOW??? Lightning is not just confined to thunderstorms. It can even be generated by the ash cloud from an erupting volcano. Lightning is also not just confined to the Earth; lightning has been observed on Jupiter and Venus.

One characteristic that makes lightning so dangerous is its extensive range. Lightning has the ability to strike up to 10 miles away from the thunderstorm core, making it the first storm hazard to arrive and the last to leave. The other characteristic that makes lightning so dangerous is its power and speed. The average lightning bolt carries 100 million volts of electrical potential and generates a temperature that can exceed 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit. All of this energy is concentrated in a channel no larger than a U.S. quarter.

DID YOU KNOW??? Contrary to belief, lightning CAN strike the same place twice and rubber shoes or tires DO NOT protect you from lightning strikes.

Thunder is a result of lightning. When a lightning bolt travels through the atmosphere, it heats the air around it rapidly. This accelerated heating creates rapid expansion of the air around the lightning bolt. This air moves at speeds faster than the speed of sound. The speeding air breaks the sound barrier resulting in the explosive sound we know as thunder. Thunder is really just another form of a sonic boom.

DID YOU KNOW??? Thunder travels at the speed of sound, which is roughly one mile every five seconds. When you observe lightning, count the number of seconds it takes to hear the thunder after seeing the lightning flash, and then divide by 5 to determine approximately how far the lightning strike is from you in

miles. For example, if it takes 15 seconds for the thunder to reach you, then the lightning strike occurred about three miles away.

It is possible to see lightning far off in the distance and never hear the thunder it produces. "Heat lightning" is seen from a very far distance, but so far away that thunder is not heard because the sound waves dissipate before they reach the observer.

How many times have you been at the beach or engaging in some outdoor activity, and have seen a thunderstorm approaching? Many of us assume that the storm is too far away to pose any danger and many believe that if the storm is not producing rain at their location then they are not at risk of being impacted by the storm. A "Bolt from the Blue" lightning strike is a flash which travels a relatively large distance away from the parent thunderstorm. These events can be especially dangerous, as they appear to come from "clear blue sky." This was the case on July 4th, 2009, in the town of Winston in Polk County, where lightning struck a soccer field as a group was in the middle of a game and picnic. There was no rain near the field and the thunderstorm cell was 6 miles south of their location. In all, 26 people were injured and 1 person was killed. Being alert for changes in the sky and watching for developing thunderstorms on the horizon may help in keeping you safe from these dangerous lightning bolts that span miles away from the main thunderstorm.

Whether a thunderstorm produces 1 bolt or 100 bolts of lightning, they are all potential killers. As the #1 thunderstorm threat in Florida, lightning results in an average of 10 fatalities and 40 injuries around the state each year, with the deadliest month being July. 5 people in Florida died from lightning strikes on 2009, with over 50 injuries reported across the state. This was more than any other state in the U.S. Nearly half of all lightning deaths occur in open areas. Outdoor water activities such as swimming, boating and fishing are equally as dangerous during lightning storms. Therefore, when thunderstorms are approaching, avoid outdoor activities as if your life depends on it – because it does!

The key rule of lightning safety is: If you can hear thunder, then you are close enough to be struck by lightning.

As soon as you see lightning or hear thunder, seek shelter in a substantial building or car with metal roof. Picnic pavilions, tents, golf carts and vehicles with soft roofs are not safe shelters during thunderstorms. When indoors, avoid using electrical appliances or touching metal objects. If you are caught outside in a thunderstorm and cannot find shelter, try to minimize your risk of being struck by crouching low to the ground on the balls of your feet with your head between your legs and hands on top of the head. Do not lie flat on the ground or stand near tall poles or trees.

Although the National Weather Service does not issue specific lightning warnings, products such as the Hazardous Weather Outlook can indicate the threat level for lightning in your area on any given day.

[NWS Mobile Daily Graphical Hazards](#)
[NWS Tallahassee Daily Graphical Hazards](#)
[NWS Jacksonville Daily Hazards](#)
[NWS Melbourne Daily Graphical Hazards](#)
[NWS Tampa Daily Graphical Hazards](#)
[NWS Miami Daily Graphical Hazards](#)
[NWS Key West Daily Hazards](#)

Lightning Safety Awareness Week is June 20 - 26, 2010 and more information about lightning hazards and what you can do to protect yourself and others can be found at www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov and www.floridadisaster.org

Tuesday's topics will be on marine hazards and rip currents.

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Each day focuses on a specific weather event. **Tuesday's focus is on marine hazards and rip currents.**

Florida's beaches attract millions of residents and tourists each year. However, while there may be beautiful weather in the sky, there are unseen dangers in the waters.

Rip currents, sometimes erroneously referred to as rip tides or undertows, occur naturally and affect many Florida beaches year-round. An average of 10 people die in Florida each year after getting caught in rip currents. Since 1989, rip currents have accounted for more than 350 drownings along Florida's Gulf and Atlantic beaches. In 2009, 14 people lost their lives due to rip currents, 8 along the Florida Panhandle coast alone, with 6 deaths occurring along the Florida East Coast.

Rip currents are part of the natural near-shore ocean circulation and are quite common, occurring at many beaches every day on both the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of Florida. Most rip currents develop along the beach at breaks in the sandbar, but they can also form near jetties and piers. Rip currents form when water, piled against the shore, begins to return to deeper water. Typically, onshore winds and waves push water over the offshore sandbar, allowing excess water to collect between the bar and the beach. Eventually, this excess water starts to return seaward through low spots in the sandbar, "ripping" an opening. Weather or ocean conditions can cause rip currents to be stronger and more frequent on some days than on others and can last from a few minutes to a few days.

DID YOU KNOW??? You can sometimes see the signs that show a rip current is present. A visible channel of churning, choppy water; a narrow channel where there is a difference in water color; a line of seaward moving foam; an offshore area of murky water are all indicators of possible rip currents.

Rip currents are dangerous because they can pull unprepared swimmers away from shore and into deeper offshore waters. They become especially dangerous when swimmers panic and struggle against the current while being pulled farther and farther away from the beach. Contrary to popular belief, rip currents do not pull a swimmer under the water. The force of a rip current is too strong for even the strongest of swimmers, and attempts to swim directly back toward shore, especially for the panicked and tired swimmer, can be fatal. In fact, rip currents claim more lives in Florida each year than do hurricanes, tornadoes and lightning.

Florida's Atlantic and Gulf coasts also attract plenty of boaters year-round. Before venturing out on the water, it is important for boaters to check on the weather. What may seem like a tranquil start to the day can quickly turn violent with hazards such as severe thunderstorms, strong winds, rough seas, lightning and waterspouts. Never let thunderstorms cut off your route back to land. If a thunderstorm or waterspout threatens, it is best to seek safe harbor immediately. If you are unable to get back to the dock, be sure everyone aboard is wearing a life jacket, as gusty thunderstorm winds or waterspouts

can quickly overturn small boats. If caught near a waterspout, your best course of evasive action is to move at a 90 degree angle from its apparent movement, then seek safe harbor, if possible. Since lightning presents the greatest danger to boaters, boaters should seek safe shelter anytime thunder is heard. If unable to reach safe shelter, go below deck and stay away from masts or ungrounded metal objects.

Knowing what kind of weather to expect is one of the keys to staying safe during your boating adventure. There are a few things that you can do to protect yourself from the dangers of rip currents and marine hazards. Before you leave, check the latest National Weather Service forecast for local beach and boating conditions. National Weather Service offices around Florida issue a surf zone forecast and coastal waters forecasts each day, which includes the expected rip current risk and marine conditions. These forecasts should be your primary tools for planning a safe day on the water.

At the beach, look for the nearest lifeguards and check with them about existing water conditions. If you're going to a beach with no lifeguard on duty, look for warning flags or signs. If you find yourself caught in a rip current, don't panic and don't fight the current. Swim in a direction parallel to the shoreline either toward your left or right. Just remembering the simple phrase "Don't fight...Swim left or right" could save your life. When free of the current, swim at an angle back toward shore.

National Safe Boating Week is March 22-28, 2010. Rip Current Safety Awareness Week is June 6-12, 2010. More information on rip currents can be found at www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov and www.floridadisaster.org

Wednesday's topic will be on tornadoes and severe thunderstorms.

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Each day focuses on a specific weather event. **Wednesday's focus is on thunderstorms and tornadoes.**

Thunderstorms occur frequently across Florida. In fact, Florida has the greatest number of thunderstorms in the United States. Florida averages over 70 days per year in which thunderstorms affect a part of Florida. Areas of the Florida Gulf coast experience over 80 and even 100 days a year when thunderstorms occur. Hazards within thunderstorms include lightning, hail, gusty winds, heavy rain that may cause flooding, and tornadoes.

One of the reasons Florida has so many thunderstorms is that many of the ingredients needed to create thunderstorms can be found here almost every day. Since Florida is surrounded by water, not to mention the many inland lakes, rivers and swamps, there are plenty of sources of water vapor to feed thunderstorms. Sources of lift can be an approaching frontal system, or – as on most summer afternoons – the sun heating the ground.

Thunderstorms come in different forms. Sometimes a storm has only one thunderstorm cloud and sometimes thunderstorms have a family of clouds, or cells, associated with them that can grow as large as an entire county. Also, thunderstorms may go on for a very long time or as brief as a few minutes.

Your local National Weather Service office has meteorologists and technicians working every hour of the day and every day of the year. They issue warnings when thunderstorms become severe and these warnings give people time to move to a place of safety.

DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A WATCH AND A WARNING??? A Severe Thunderstorm Warning means thunderstorms containing winds of 58 mph or greater and quarter size hail or larger has been indicated by radar. A Severe Thunderstorm Watch means that conditions are favorable for severe storms to develop.

When a severe thunderstorm threatens your location, go to a small interior room on the lowest floor of your building and stay away from windows. If time permits, move vehicles into garages or carports to prevent hail or wind damage. In vehicles, avoid driving into severe storms. Pull over and wait for the storm to pass.

Tornadoes and severe thunderstorms are more common in Florida than people may think. When most people think of Florida weather hazards, tornadoes do not typically come to mind. However, since 1970, more than 2,400 tornadoes have been reported across the state of Florida, with over 40 reported across Florida in 2009.

DID YOU KNOW??? Florida has the fourth highest number of tornado occurrences each year? Only Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas average more tornadoes in each year. Florida also ranks fourth in the amount of damage caused by tornadoes.

A tornado is a violent column of rotating air that comes down from a thunderstorm to reach the ground. Tornadoes usually last only a few minutes, but they can cause much damage as they travel along the ground. Some tornadoes can travel for many dozens of miles while other tornadoes may appear to skip above the ground for a few moments. If a funnel cloud is not touching the ground, it is NOT a tornado.

Tornadoes can develop within very strong thunderstorms along sea breeze boundaries or squall lines ahead of frontal systems, but can also occur near the edge of tropical cyclones in rainbands which can extend 100 or more miles from the center of the tropical system. Tornadoes can also form over the water, which are called waterspouts. Most of these are weak, but waterspouts that reach the shore can cause the same damage as a tornado.

DID YOU KNOW??? The Florida Keys are widely referred to as the “waterspout capital of the world. It is estimated that more than 400 waterspouts occur each year along the Florida Keys alone, with hundreds also reported along other areas of the Florida coast.

Most tornadoes in Florida occur in June, July and August. However, the strongest tornadoes in Florida usually occur in February, March and April. Also, history shows that tornadoes are just as likely to form after midnight as they do during the afternoon and early evening. This is why it is important to be prepared as we enter into the more active severe weather season.

The National Weather Service uses tools and volunteers to watch for severe weather. Skywarn Severe Weather Spotters are volunteers who report tornadoes to the National Weather Service. The local National Weather Service office will issue a tornado warning when a tornado is either seen by a severe weather spotter or indicated by Doppler radar.

A Tornado Warning means a tornado has been indicated by radar or spotted on the ground. A Tornado Watch means that conditions are favorable for tornadoes to develop.

You and your family need to take cover right away whenever a tornado warning is issued for your area. Seek shelter on the lowest floor in an interior hallway, closet or small room of your home or office. The best wind safety rule is to get as many walls between you and the outside world as possible so the debris in the wind cannot reach you. Leave mobile homes and find a stronger building or house. As a last resort, get under heavy furniture, away from windows and use pillows to cover your head. When outside, try to seek shelter in a nearby structure. If this is not possible, do not stay in your car, but lie flat in the nearest depression, ditch or culvert and cover your head with your arms. Do not seek shelter under bridges and do not try to outrun a tornado.

National Weather Service meteorologists use the Enhanced Fujita Scale, or EF Scale, to rate the strength of tornadoes. Meteorologists first look at the tornado damage and then estimate the wind speed that would have been needed to cause the damage.

NOAA All-Hazards Alert Radio is the best way to stay informed about tornadoes. These are special radios that receive weather information and will turn on and alert you of dangerous weather. In many

cases, only a few minutes of warning are given between the time a warning is issued and the eventual tornado touchdown. Nevertheless, even a few minutes of warning can make the difference between life and death. It is also very important to make sure the radio is always plugged in and has a strong battery in case the power goes out.

If a tornado struck tomorrow would you be prepared? Would you know what actions to take? Planning and practice are keys to tornado safety. Whether in homes, schools or businesses, everyone should have a plan in place for severe weather. The annual tornado drill gives Floridians a chance to realistically test their plans and determine whether or not they are prepared.

The National Weather Service and the Florida Division of Emergency Management will conduct a statewide tornado drill on Wednesday, January 27, at 10:10am EST, or 9:10am CST. Floridians are asked to consider themselves under a tornado watch during the morning. A Tornado watch means that you should closely monitor the weather and be prepared to go to a safe place in the event of a tornado warning. At 10:10am EST/9:10am CST, the National Weather Service will issue a Drill Tornado Warning. This warning will be broadcast on the Emergency Alert System and NOAA weather radio as a routine weekly test message. The drill will conclude around 10:30 am EST. If actual severe weather threatens Florida on January 27, the drill will be postponed until Friday, January 29. Even if you do not participate in the morning drill, all schools, families and businesses are encouraged to talk about their tornado safety plan that day.

For additional information about tornadoes and severe thunderstorms, visit www.nssl.noaa.gov/edu/safety/tornadoguide.html or www.floridadisaster.org

Thursday's focus is on hurricanes and flooding.

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Each day focuses on a specific weather event. **Thursday's focus is on hurricanes and flooding.**

Florida has a long history of hurricanes. Records indicate that approximately 110 hurricanes and almost 200 tropical storms have impacted the state since 1851 with many more cited in history books before records were kept. No other state in the country has more hurricane landfalls per year on average than does Florida. Nearly 40% of all hurricanes that strike the United States make landfall in Florida. The unique location of Florida in the sub-tropics makes it vulnerable to tropical storms and hurricanes and the relatively flat terrain can also make it susceptible to flooding.

Florida is surrounded by very warm waters, which breed and support hurricanes: the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Gulf of Mexico to the west and the Caribbean Sea well to the south. The North Atlantic Ocean hurricane season runs from June 1-November 30. However, tropical systems can still form outside of hurricane season. This was experienced in 2005 and 2007 with Tropical Storms Zeta and Olga forming in December. In 1951, Hurricane Able formed on May 15.

The 2009 hurricane season recorded 9 named storms, 3 of which became hurricanes. For the fourth year in a row, Florida escaped major impacts from hurricanes. Nevertheless, the state was directly affected by Tropical Storm Claudette on August 17, 2009, and Tropical Storm Ida on November 9, 2009, causing approximately \$300,000 in damage. Despite the inactivity in the state over the past few years, we know that it only takes one storm to affect our state for long lasting impacts to be felt. The 1992 hurricane season is a perfect example. Only six named storms developed that year, but the only major hurricane to form produced widespread devastation across South Florida. This is why residents and visitors need to always be prepared for hurricanes, even if below normal hurricane activity is forecast.

A tropical storm will have sustained winds of 39-73 mph. When a storm's maximum sustained winds reach 74mph, it is considered a hurricane. Meteorologists use the Saffir-Simpson Scale to rate the strength of a hurricane based on wind speed.

- CAT 1 Winds 74 -95 mph. No real damage to buildings. Damage to unanchored mobile homes.
- CAT 2 Winds 96 -110 mph. Some damage to building roofs, doors and windows. Considerable damage to mobile homes. Some trees blown down.
- CAT 3 Winds 111-130 mph. Some structural damage to small homes. Large trees blown down. Mobile homes and poorly built signs destroyed.
- CAT 4 Winds 131-155 mph. Wall failures in homes and complete roof structure failure on small homes. Total destruction of mobile homes. Trees, shrubs and signs all blown down.
- CAT 5 Winds 156mph+. Complete roof failure on homes and industrial buildings. Some complete building failures.

When a tropical system approaches the state, The National Hurricane Center will issue watches and warnings. Do you know the difference between a watch and warning? A hurricane watch issued for your part of the coast indicates the possibility that you could experience hurricane conditions within 48 hours. This watch should trigger your family's disaster plan, and protective measures should be initiated. A hurricane warning issued for your part of the coast indicates that sustained winds of at least 74 mph are expected within 36 hours. Once this warning has been issued, your family should be in the process of completing protective actions and deciding the safest location to be during the storm. Tropical storm watches and warnings are also issued when winds of 39-73mph are expected to impact an area within 36 to 48 hours.

One common misconception is that there are parts of our state that do not get hurricanes. In the last 150 years, all of Florida's coastlines have been impacted by at least one hurricane. Your main protection against hurricanes is to be prepared and have a plan. Hurricane force winds can easily destroy poorly constructed buildings and mobile homes. A hurricane plan doesn't have to be anything extremely complicated, but should at least consist of the following two things. First, determine whether you live in an evacuation zone. This information can be obtained from your local emergency management office. If you live in an evacuation zone, know when and where you will be going to pass the storm. Have a list of emergency telephone numbers handy. Second, stock up on non-perishable supplies, batteries for electronic devices such as your NOAA Alert Radio, and have a disaster supply kit ready with enough provisions to last 3 to 5 days. To minimize wind damage, assess your property to ensure that landscaping and trees do not become a wind hazard.

While hurricanes are known and feared for their ferocious winds, historically it is the water that causes most of the deaths in hurricanes. About 90% of all hurricane fatalities occur from drowning in either storm surge or freshwater flooding. The widespread flooding caused by Tropical Storm Fay in 2008 serves as a reminder that tropical storms can cause as much or greater devastation than hurricanes with freshwater flooding.

Even outside of tropical systems, flooding is a serious concern in Florida since it can happen anywhere and at any time. Our state is nearly surrounded by water and the state receives a lot of evaporated water from these seas. Everyday showers and thunderstorms can produce heavy rainfall that may result in flooding. Flooding is caused by the amount of rainfall (meteorology) and what happens to the rain after it hits the ground (hydrology).

As our state's population increases, buildings and pavement replace the natural land. This creates more water runoff and can increase flood problems. Most deaths due to flooding in the United States are due to people driving their cars into flooded areas. Did you know that just 6 inches of fast-moving floodwater can knock you off your feet and 2 feet of water can sweep an SUV off a road? Once a vehicle begins to float, the situation for the driver and passengers becomes dangerous and often deadly. Residents should be aware of their location with respect to flood-prone areas and know evacuation routes. People are also urged to be extremely cautious. Drive carefully in heavy rains, especially when water covers the road. Because it is difficult to determine the depth of water or the condition of the road under the water, if you come to a flooded road, remember the phrase "Turn Around Don't Drown".

Meteorologists at the National Hurricane Center, the Southeast River Forecast Center and local National Weather Service offices all watch the weather and use satellite pictures, Doppler radar and computer models to try to warn people well in advance of the flooding, so they can save lives and property. Flood Watches and Warnings, along with Flash Flood Watches and warning are issued for a specific area when flooding conditions are likely or are already occurring.

National Flood Awareness Week is March 15-19, 2010. National Hurricane Preparedness Week is May 23-29, 2010. To learn more about hurricanes, flooding and hurricane readiness, visit www.nhc.noaa.gov or www.FloridaDisaster.org.

Friday's topic will be on temperature extremes and wildfires.

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Each day focuses on a specific weather event. **Friday's focus is on temperature extremes and wildfires.**

Though Florida is known as the Sunshine State, it could also qualify as the "Hot State." Each summer, numerous tourists come from all over the world to enjoy the warm weather and sunny beaches, but most are unaware of just how hot it can get in Florida. Surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, the state is always influenced by tropical moisture, especially in the summer. When high humidity values are combined with high temperatures, it makes our bodies think it's hotter than it actually is. This is called the heat index. When the heat index reaches more than 105 degrees Fahrenheit, conditions become dangerous for the general population. A person can experience sunstroke, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and even heatstroke if exposed to these conditions for a long period of time. The National Weather Service will issue heat advisories and warnings when the combination of heat and humidity causes the heat index to reach an extreme caution level.

DID YOU KNOW??? The hottest temperature ever recorded in Florida was 109 degrees Fahrenheit on June 29, 1931, in Monticello.

To help protect yourself against the hot summer heat, make sure to wear lightweight and light-colored clothing. Try to avoid doing or scheduling outdoor events during the hottest parts of the day (usually 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.). Drink plenty of water or other non-alcoholic beverages. Check on the elderly, young children and animals during periods of prolonged heat. Apply sunscreen before exposure to the sun.

Though many people head south to escape the cold temperatures in the winter, it isn't always warmer in Florida. There have been numerous severe cold outbreaks that have affected the state with below freezing temperatures and strong winds that produce bitterly cold wind chills. Increased wind speeds at cold temperatures accelerate the heat loss from exposed skin, and the wind chill is a measure of this effect. These conditions make a person or animal "feel" colder than the actual temperature. The National Weather Service will issue wind chill advisories and warnings, along with freeze watches and warnings, when cold weather threatens the area.

DID YOU KNOW??? The coldest temperature recorded in Florida was minus 2 degrees Fahrenheit in Tallahassee on Feb. 13, 1899.

Floridians should remember the "**Five P's**" of cold weather safety. The "5 P's" are: **Protecting People, Protecting Plants, Protecting Pets, Protect Exposed Pipes, and Practice Fire Safety.**

To prepare yourself from the bitter cold, stay indoors and use a safe heating source. Make sure to use space heaters according to their instructions, and be attentive to open flames. Do not use charcoal or other fuel-burning devices, such as grills that produce carbon monoxide. When outdoors, stay dry and in wind protected areas and wear multiple layers of loose-fitting, warm clothing.

Also, be aware of sensitive plants and animals. Bring in potted plants and drape a blanket, sheet or tarp over plants in the ground. Pets are just as susceptible to the cold as people are. Bring all domesticated pets indoors or at least provide shelter for animals with a closed door to keep out the wind. Make sure the shelter is clean, dry, and well insulated with straw, wood shavings or a blanket. Pet stores sell heated bowls to resist water freezing. Be sure to have extra food as outdoor animals require more calories in the winter to generate energy to ward off the cold. Horses and other livestock need a windbreak, cover, warm bedding, abundant high-quality feed, and fresh water, too.

Wildfire season in Florida is considered to be 12 months long since fires can occur at any time of the year. However, most wildfires occur during the January-June period when tropical moisture is cut off to the state and cold fronts bring dry, windy conditions. Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings are issued by the National Weather Service to alert people and land managers to potentially hazardous burning conditions that may add to wildfire danger and lead to the loss of control of a fire.

From January through October of 2009, more than 2,800 wildfires across Florida burned over 136,000 acres of state and federal lands. Though this may seem like a lot of fires, 2009 was a fairly inactive wildfire season compared to recent years. Part of the reason for the inactive wildfire season this past year was the development of El Niño in the Pacific Ocean during the early summer months. This re-occurring phenomenon creates a change in the atmospheric weather patterns that result in wetter and cooler than normal conditions across the Southeastern United States. With the wet conditions the state has already experienced and continues to experience with El Niño, the potential for another subdued fire season in 2010 is possible.

To help control the spread of wildfires, residents across Florida are urged to be "Firewise". The Firewise program is designed to help homeowners reduce the threat of wildfire around their homes. Homeowners can make their yards fire resistant by planting specific types of vegetation and landscaping in a way that fire will not threaten their homes. Information and tips on this program can be found at www.firewise.org. National Fire Prevention Week is October 3-9, 2010. More information on wildfires can also be found on www.FloridaDisaster.org