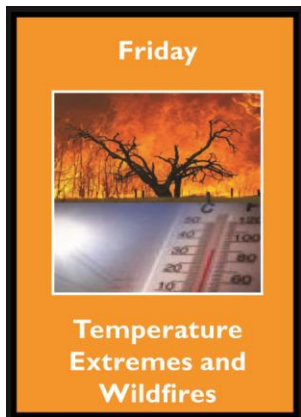




**Florida's Severe Weather Awareness Week** takes place from February 1-5, 2021. Severe Weather Awareness Week is an opportunity for Floridians to learn about the various weather hazards that frequently impact the state and how families and businesses can prepare for these natural events.



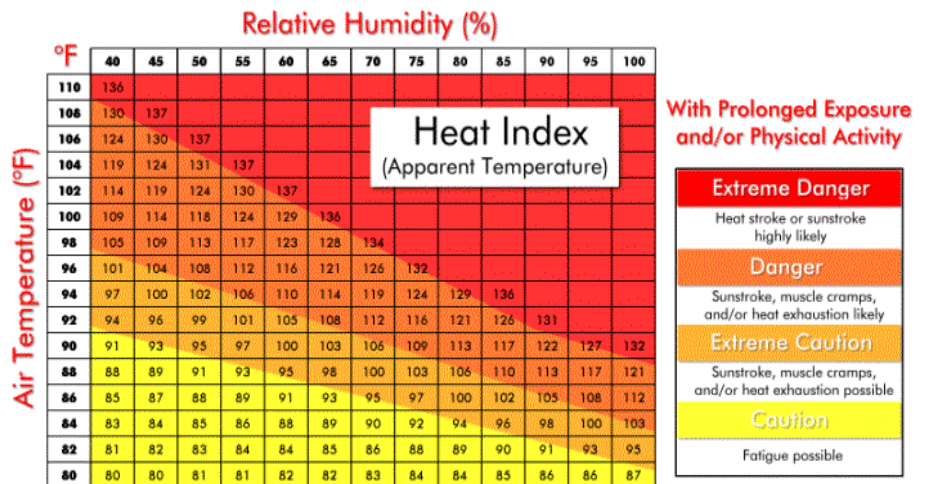
Each day focuses on a specific weather event. **Friday's topic is temperature extremes and wildfires.**

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 hot temperatures combine with high humidity, our bodies feel like it is hotter than it really is since the increased moisture in the air limits our body's ability to cool off through sweating. This is called the Heat Index. When the heat index reaches higher than 105 degrees F, conditions can become dangerous for both people and animals. A person can experience heat cramps, heat exhaustion, or heatstroke that may result in death if exposed to these conditions for a long period of time. When the combination of heat and humidity causes the heat index to reach dangerous levels, the National Weather service will issue Heat Advisories and Warnings.

**DID YOU KNOW???** The hottest temperature ever recorded in Florida was 109 degrees Fahrenheit on June 29, 1931, in Monticello. In 2010, a heat index of 124 degrees was observed at the Apalachicola Airport.

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 and non-caffeinated 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 is not always warmer in Florida. Numerous severe cold outbreaks have affected the state with snow or ice, below freezing temperatures, and strong winds that produce bitterly cold wind chills. Strong winds can also make the air “feel” colder than it really is by removing the heat from our skin that our bodies generate. This is called the Wind Chill. Like high heat, very cold temperatures can also endanger humans. The National Weather Service will issue Wind Chill Advisories, Freeze Watches or Warnings, Hard Freeze Watches or Warnings, and Winter Weather Advisories and Winter Storm Warnings if cold and/or wintry weather will threaten an area.

***DID YOU KNOW???*** The coldest temperature recorded in Florida was -2 degrees (2 degrees below 0) 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:** dress in layers and wear a hat and gloves. Stay out of the wind and stay dry. Check on young children and elders who are the most sensitive to cold weather.

**Protecting Plants:** Bring in potted plants and drape a blanket, sheet, or tarp over plants in the ground.

**Protecting Pets:** 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.

**Protect Exposed Pipes:** Cover pipes and allow outdoor faucets to slowly drip to prevent them from freezing and breaking.

**Practice Fire Safety:** Use safe-heating sources indoors. Do not use fuel-burning devices such as grills; they release carbon monoxide, which is a deadly gas. Also, make sure to use space heaters according to their instructions and be attentive to open flames.



Not only should practicing fire safety be considered when trying to heat your home during the winter, but residents and visitors should practice fire safety outdoors since wildfire season in Florida is considered to be 12 months long. While wildfires can start at any time of the year, the state sees a peak of activity during the early part of the year – beginning in January and continuing until the onset of more frequent rain, usually in early to mid-June. 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.

**DID YOU KNOW???** A typical year in Florida will see over 3,000 fires burn nearly 163,500 acres of land.

While there are natural ways a wildfire can be ignited, most wildfires are started by humans. The most common causes of human-started fires are arson and yard waste burns that get out of control. Fires can also be caused by discarding a cigarette that has not been fully extinguished. Other causes of wildfires include campfires and bonfires not being properly extinguished or windy conditions that may take hot embers from the fire to another location. The stronger the wind and the drier the ground, the faster fires will spread.

2020 was another active and impactful wildfire season. The combination of drought and strong cold fronts that brought in dry and windy conditions led to rapid spread of 3 major wildfires in particular. On May 6, the *5 Mile Swamp* Wildfire in Santa Rosa County rapidly spread across I-10, burning 2,215 acres and damaging or destroying 34 buildings. On the same day, the smaller but ferocious *Musset Bayou* Wildfire in Walton County burned 343 acres and damaged or destroyed 41 buildings. Later in the month just before Tropical Storm Arthur on May 13, the *36<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE* Wildfire in Collier County burned 8,250 acres and damaged or destroyed 45 buildings.

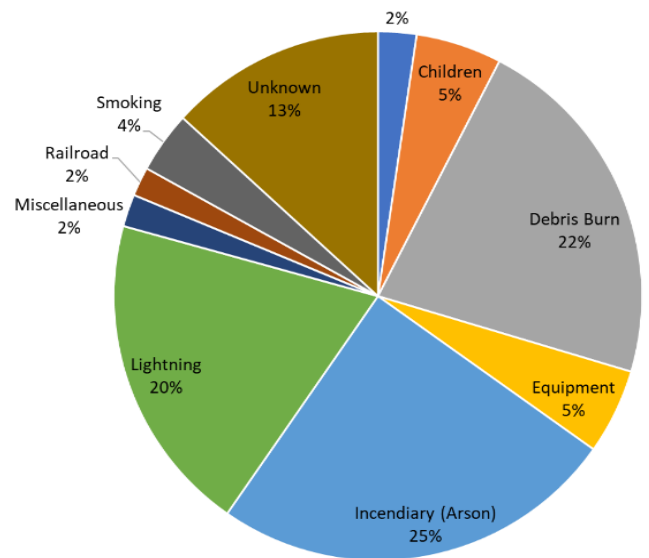
Wildfires can cause major environmental, social, and economic damages. Prescribed fires are good fires that reduce the hazardous accumulations of brush to lower the risk of loss to homes, businesses, recreation areas, and forests when wildfires occur. Prescribed fire also controls forest tree diseases and recycles nutrients in the soil. Wildfires often begin unnoticed. They spread quickly, igniting grasses, trees and homes.

Reduce your risk by preparing now - before wildfire strikes. Meet with your family to decide what to do and where to go if wildfires threaten your area. Find out how you can promote and practice wildfire safety by becoming [Firewise](#).

Prescribed Fire Awareness Week in Florida is January 24 – January 31, 2021. Florida Wildfire Awareness Week is typically held the 1<sup>st</sup> week of April, which will be April 4-10 this year. More information on temperature hazards and wildfires and what you can do to protect yourself and others can be found at [www.weather.gov/safety/winter](http://www.weather.gov/safety/winter), [www.weather.gov/safety/cold](http://www.weather.gov/safety/cold), [www.weather.gov/safety/heat](http://www.weather.gov/safety/heat), [www.weather.gov/safety/drought](http://www.weather.gov/safety/drought), [www.weather.gov/safety/wildfire](http://www.weather.gov/safety/wildfire), <https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service>, <https://www.ready.gov/wildfires>, and <https://www.floridadisaster.org/hazards/>.

All NWS Safety Links: <https://www.weather.gov/safety/>

### Wildfire by Cause 1981-2019



Courtesy: Florida Forest Service

Be Prepared. Be StormReady.