

Illinois Weather Trivia for May

May 1

- 1983: Several tornadoes occurred in the eastern St. Louis metropolitan area. The strongest originated in St. Louis, then moved across the Mississippi River, passing through Granite City and Edwardsville. This storm caused \$400,000 damage. Another tornado near Lebanon injured 20 people. Further north, a tornado in Greenfield injured 15 people and caused extensive damage.
- 2011: Copious rainfall in southeast Illinois occurred in late April and early May. This resulted in serious river flooding over parts of the Wabash and Embarras River basins. The Embarras River at Lawrenceville, and the Wabash River at Hutsonville, each crested at 11 feet over flood stage. Three breaches occurred in the Cross Levee in Lawrence County on the 3rd, resulting in extensive flash flooding.

May 2

- 1929: Winter made one last appearance in central Illinois. Springfield reported 6/10 of an inch of snow, which is the latest date that measurable snow has fallen in the city.
- 1942: A family of strong tornadoes moved across central Illinois. Tornadoes touched down in eastern Morgan County, then moved northeast. The tornadoes hit south of New Berlin, then moved across far northwestern Springfield, passing south of Elkhart, and lifting near Waynesville, in DeWitt County. In the town of Franklin, 105 homes were damaged or destroyed, with some debris carried four miles. One person died, and 12 were injured.

May 3

- 1868: A tornado traveled 15 miles across Warren and Knox Counties, northwest of Galesburg. The small town of Ionia was destroyed in Warren County. 16 homes and 2 churches in Ionia were destroyed, along with 30 homes elsewhere. The tornado killed 6 people and injured 40. Many of the casualties occurred during a church service, when the church roof was lifted and dropped into the congregation.
- 1958: A tornado in Vermillion County, IN, moved north northwest into Edgar County, IL. Damage from this tornado was confined to the Indiana section. This is believed to be one of the few, if not the only, tornadoes to move from Indiana into Illinois.
- 1996: Severe thunderstorms affected parts of central and eastern Illinois during the evening. Golf ball size hail was reported on the east side of Springfield as well as at Riverton. South of Xenia in Clay County, hail reached the size of baseballs. The storms also produced strong winds which caused damage to some buildings and telephone poles.

May 4

- 1992: A tornado was observed 4 miles southeast of Hopedale, in Tazewell County, damaging trees, power lines, and some buildings. The thunderstorm that produced this tornado also

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produced brief tornado touchdowns at Cooksville and Lexington, both in McLean County.

May 5

- 1977: Severe thunderstorms moved across central and northeast Illinois during the evening hours. The town of Atlanta, in northeast Logan County, was hit by a tornado, destroying 4 homes and severely damaging 12 others. The tornado moved northeast for about 10 miles, lifting just southwest of Bloomington.

May 6

- 1876: A tornado, estimated at F3 intensity, tracked 4 miles across Chicago, collapsing many buildings downtown. The damaged buildings included a candy factory, a hospital, a freight depot, and a church. The tornado moved out over Lake Michigan, and was observed by a reporter to have multiple vortices. Further south in Illinois, across Cumberland County, a tornado blew a moving passenger train off the tracks near Neoga, injuring all 19 people aboard.
- 1983: A dust storm, unusual in Illinois, affected central and northeast parts of the state. The dust was kicked up from freshly plowed farm fields, and blown northeast by winds up to 60 mph. The dust reduced visibility in some areas to near zero. Numerous accidents resulted, including one near Rantoul which involved 9 cars and 2 semi-trailers.
- 2003: A [violent tornado tracked across the southern tip of Illinois](#). The tornado touched down near Grand Chain in Pulaski County, moving east to near Joppa in Massac County, before curving northeast and lifting near Golconda in Pope County, a total of 33 miles and 1 hour 10 minutes. Two people were killed and 33 injured. The tornado caused severe damage to the forested region of the area, as well as to a few dozen homes and trailers. The storms also produced an estimated wind gust of 125 mph northeast of Metropolis.

May 7

- 1992: Very dry weather prevailed in northern and central Illinois during the month. Records for the driest May were set in Chicago, Moline, and Rockford. Springfield reported .52" of rain during the month, while Peoria had .82"; both finished as the second driest May on record.

May 8

- 1988: Severe thunderstorms moved across northern and central Illinois. Winds gusted to 81 mph in Rockford, 75 mph in Pontiac, over 80 mph east of Springfield, and over 70 mph east of Peoria. Damage was reported to dozens of trees and power lines down. \$1.5 million damage occurred to buildings in East Peoria, with \$1 million damage in Greene County.
- 1996: Slow moving thunderstorms dumped several inches of rain over a large part of central and eastern Illinois. In Sangamon County, Up to 600 homes were affected by flooding, although most

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damage was minor. At Springfield's Capital Airport, the rain total of 3.54 inches was a record for the date, and was the 2nd highest total on record for a single day during May. The storms were also responsible for an 80 mph wind gust which caused damage near Loami and Glenarm, in southern Sangamon County. In Lawrence County of southeast Illinois, nearly the entire town of Birds was evacuated due to flood waters.

- 2000: Severe thunderstorms caused damage in portions of west central Illinois during the afternoon. A tornado touched down near Shamrock, in McLean County, causing damage to several machine sheds and barns, and a home 2 miles northwest of Downs received major damage. Another tornado touched down west of Parkland, in Tazewell County, destroying 4 grain bins and blowing a machine shed 100 yards. In Woodford, a 27-mile-long area received damage to trees, power poles, and power lines, and several machine sheds were destroyed by winds gusting as high as 80 mph.

May 9

- 1927: A tornado touched down 5 miles east of Morrisonville, in southwestern Christian County, then moved northeast to Decatur. In Christian County, the tornado killed one person and caused 67 injuries. The tornado widened in the Decatur area, did minor damage to over 1,000 homes, and injured around 50 people.
- 1995: Severe weather struck central Illinois, with numerous reports of hail and tornadoes. The strongest tornado originated northwest of Springfield around 5 pm, moving northeast. It affected areas along the Menard/Sangamon County border, especially the small town of Cantrall. The tornado then moved into southern Logan County through the town of Elkhart. The tornado was on the ground for 40 miles, finally lifting in eastern Logan County, about 5 miles northeast of the town of Beason. Six people were injured by these tornadoes, with damage estimated around \$10 million. Severe thunderstorms also produced two strong tornadoes in northwest parts of Illinois, each of which traveled over 40 miles.

May 10

- 1880: A tornado estimated to be F4 intensity moved across 20 miles of Scott and Morgan Counties. The tornado touched down near Aley and moved northeast, passing 8 miles south of Jacksonville. The tornado was strongest in the Pisgah area, where 30 buildings were destroyed. Seven people were killed. Further east, an F3 tornado touched down just north of Clinton, and moved northeast to near Arrowsmith, across DeWitt and McLean Counties.
- 1996: Thunderstorms produced 3 to 5 inches of rain across parts of east central Illinois during the morning, leading to flash floods. In southern Champaign County, the town of Broadlands sustained major flood damage to 5 homes and minor damage to another 29, as well as to the local high school. In Vermilion County, parts of Danville had to be evacuated after flood gates were opened on Lake Vermilion.
- 2003: Several tornadoes touched down during the evening across central and western Illinois. A long track tornado caused extensive damage in eastern parts of South Pekin, destroying 50

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homes and damaging another 80. The tornado moved into Morton, destroying several apartment buildings and damaging many vehicles on I-155 and I-74. Over 100 homes in Morton were damaged.

May 11

- 1952: A few snow flurries fell on Springfield, establishing the date of the city's latest snowfall on record.
- 2008: Unseasonably strong low pressure moved across central Illinois during the daytime hours on Mothers Day. The strong pressure gradient produced widespread wind gusts of 40 to 50 mph, with local gusts over 60 mph. The winds blew down numerous tree limbs, and a few trees.

May 12

- 1886: A tornado which peaked at F4 intensity touched down in Vermilion County near Armstrong, and passed between Alvin and Rossville before moving into Indiana. At least 5 houses were destroyed, two of which were totally swept away. Three people were killed. Five other strong tornadoes occurred across Illinois that day: two near Mt. Carroll, one near Odell, one near Jacksonville, and one in Iroquois County.
- 1978: A severe thunderstorm spawned a tornado which moved across 31 miles of Macoupin and Montgomery Counties. The tornado touched down near Shipman and lifted northeast of Farmersville, causing \$245,000 damage. Later, a second tornado moved through Decatur, damaging 43 residences and 3 mobile homes.

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- 2000: Severe thunderstorms produced hail up to 2.5 inches in diameter from Eureka to Roanoke, causing \$300,000 damage to 100 cars. This was part of a cluster of severe thunderstorms, producing hail in a large area from the Illinois River to the Indiana border. Weak tornadoes were also produced near Hartsburg in Logan County, and near Dawson in Sangamon County.

May 13

- 1995: The second major tornado outbreak in a week struck central Illinois. This outbreak produced tornadoes in an area extending from the Mississippi River near Burlington, Iowa, to west of Bloomington. Two violent tornadoes, each ranked as F4 intensity, were reported. The [first tornado traveled 60 miles](#) from near Fort Madison, Iowa, to southeast of Galesburg, producing over \$10 million damage. The second violent tornado traveled 7 miles across Fulton County from Ipava to Lewistown, producing \$6 million damage. Another strong tornado took a 25 mile path across parts of Fulton, Mason, and Tazewell Counties. The storms also produced softball-size hail south and northwest of Macomb.
- 2002: Water runoff from storms on the 12th caused a continuation of flood problems across central and southeast Illinois. Several state highways in southeast Illinois were closed due to flooding. In Jasper County, an elderly woman had to be evacuated from her home due to rising flood waters, and another person had to be rescued after driving into a flooded area. In Effingham County, several motorists drove into flooded roadways and had to be rescued. Several people in Villa Grove (Douglas County) had to be evacuated via boat due to rising waters. Near Riverton, a levee breached on the Sangamon River, flooding farmland. Several water treatment plants around the Sangamon County and the power plant in Springfield had to be sandbagged to prevent flooding of the facilities.

May 14

- 1961: A tornado tracked from near Quincy to Macomb, injuring 8 people. Another tornado touched down in western Sangamon County, moving from New Berlin to near Pleasant Plains, destroying several buildings.
- 1985: Severe thunderstorms developed in DeWitt County, located between Bloomington and Decatur, and moved northward. The storms produced a wind gust of 73 mph at the Bloomington airport. In the Marshall County town of Wenona, winds up to 100 mph destroyed several barns and farm buildings. LaSalle County had 2 inch diameter hail and 60 mph winds; in Mendota, nearly every building in town sustained some damage.

May 15

- 1968: During a 55 minute span, six tornadoes moved through De Witt County. The primary damage zone occurred in the northern part of the county from Waynesville to Farmer City, with the most severe damage in Wapella. Four people were killed and 56 injured in the Wapella and Waynesville areas. This outbreak was one of 3 which moved across central Illinois that day. Besides the tornadoes, a large area of 7 to 10 inches of rain fell in parts of DeWitt, Macon, Piatt, and Champaign Counties.
- 1991: A flash flood threatened 16 children and 3 adults on a field trip in Little Grand Canyon, in southern Illinois' Shawnee National Forest. While trying to escape the rising

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waters, a teacher and three children fell into a creek and were swept downstream about a mile. They were later rescued by helicopter.

May 16

- 1995: Flash flooding was widespread across central Illinois as strong thunderstorms moved across the area. 3-4 inches of rain fell in a few hours' time. Flooding in and around Lincoln produced \$2 million damage.
- 2002: Most rivers across central and southeast Illinois were in flood, due to runoff from heavier rain several days earlier. The Embarras River at Lawrenceville crested at record levels on this date, while the Sangamon River crested from the 14th through 16th at 2nd to 3rd highest levels on record. The Illinois River would crest later in the month around the third highest levels on record.

May 17

- 1991: Severe thunderstorms moved across Illinois during the afternoon and evening hours. Baseball-size hail was reported at Oakwood in Vermilion County, with 2 inch diameter hail at Minonk, in Woodford County. In Logan County, a semi was overturned in Elkhart due to 80 mph winds; several trees were also blown over.
- 2017: A [dust storm affected central Illinois](#) from mid afternoon into mid evening. Visibility was reduced to near zero in open areas, and caused closure of several roads. This included I-72 from Jacksonville to Springfield, and I-55 from McLean to Bloomington. Winds gusting from 40 to 50 mph, dry topsoil, and loose soil from recent planting, combined to produce the blowing dust. Further northwest, severe thunderstorms produced tornadoes in Rock Island, Mercer, and Henry Counties.

May 18

- 1883: The 5th deadliest tornado outbreak on record in Illinois affected northern and central parts of the state. At least 14 strong to violent tornadoes touched down, and 52 people were killed in these storms. The largest death toll from a single tornado was 12, with 50 injuries, from an F4 storm which moved across Morgan, Cass, and Menard Counties from near Jacksonville to 5 miles west of Petersburg. This tornado completely destroyed the town of Literberry. Another tornado, which peaked at F4 intensity, killed 11 people and injured 50 along its path from the south edge of Springfield northeast to near Kenney, in DeWitt County. This particular tornado reportedly drove 10 inch by 12 inch oak timbers 10 feet into the ground. An F4 tornado in far northern Illinois touched down near Capron, and tracked for 17 miles before lifting in far southern Wisconsin. Three people near Alden were killed. Other strong to violent tornadoes affected areas around Grafton, Mt. Olive, Shipman, Mason City, Hillsboro, and Pesotum.
- 2000: A series of thunderstorms formed and moved over a two county area of east central Illinois, over a 2 and a half hour period. Over \$4 million worth of damage was reported. The most intense damage was reported in the Jamaica and Georgetown (Vermilion County) areas. Georgetown was hit twice within an hour's time by baseball sized hail. A greenhouse sustained major damage. Thousands of cars sustained major hail damage. Also, hundreds of homes and businesses had windows broken out, and siding damaged. In Jamaica, the high school sustained around \$300,000 in damage to its

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facilities. In Pesotum (Champaign County), eleven Illinois State Patrol squad cars sustained hail damage, totaling \$24,000. No injuries were reported. Further north, severe thunderstorms in the Chicago metropolitan area blew down over 1000 trees in Highland Park, and produced a wind gust to 84 mph in Wheeling. A man in Wilmette was killed when a tree fell on his car.

May 19

- 1943: Many rivers in central Illinois were affected by record flooding during May of 1943. On the Sangamon River, a record crest of 31.52 feet occurred at Riverton on this date. Downstream, a stage of 33.9 feet at Petersburg on the 20th resulted in large sections of the town being flooded.

May 20

- 2013: Springtime of 2013 saw 20.79 inches of rain fall in the Peoria area. This established the city's wettest Spring on record. Meteorological Spring is considered to be the months of March, April, and May.

May 21

- 1949: South central Illinois was affected by several tornadoes during the late afternoon hours. One affected areas around Mount Sterling, destroying several barns and unroofing many homes. A violent tornado crossed the Mississippi River from the St. Louis area into Wood River, then to Roxanna. This tornado damaged or destroyed 300 homes in these two towns, killing 5 people. Another violent tornado in southeast Illinois caused significant damage in Palestine, before the storm moved into Indiana. Four people were killed in a destroyed restaurant in Palestine; one body was retrieved from a tree.
- 2014: Severe thunderstorms in east central Illinois produced hail of tennis ball to grapefruit size, in parts of Douglas and Piatt Counties. The largest hail was in Tuscola, where 4 inch diameter hail broke out car windows, and caused severe roof damage to many buildings. Damage estimates in Tuscola were reported to be as much as \$100 million.

May 22

- 1873: A violent tornado, estimated at F4 intensity, moved across west central Illinois. It touched down about 5 miles southwest of Roseville and tracked due east, passing just outside of Youngstown and about 1.5 miles north of Prairie City, before lifting across Fulton County. At least a dozen farms were completely devastated, with another 40 damaged to some degree. 3 people were killed, and 28 injured, along the tornado's 16 mile track.

May 23

- 1878: A tornado in northeast Illinois, which peaked at F4 intensity, touched down 6 miles east northeast of Elgin, and moved to near Barrington. Newspaper reports indicated the

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tornado lifted for brief periods of time. A farm house was carried 150 feet high before shattering, killing the two occupants.

- 1943: Record flooding was in progress along the Illinois River. Peoria reported a crest of 28.8 feet on this date, marking its highest crest on record. Downstream, record crests occurred at Havana on the 25th, at 27.2 feet, and at Beardstown on the 26th, at 29.7 feet.

May 24

- 1943: Champaign recorded 11.20 inches of rain during the month of May, setting a record for the month, and is the third wettest of any month on record. Springfield recorded 10.60 inches during the month, finishing as its fourth wettest May on record.

May 25

- 1989: Severe thunderstorms rolled across central and southern Illinois during the early afternoon. In Carlinville, hail of 2-1/2 inches in diameter caused \$1 million damage, including 55 broken windows at the Macoupin County Courthouse. Six people were injured. Tennis-ball size hail fell at Litchfield. In Vandalia, baseball size hail caused \$4 million damage at the correctional center. The hail caused major roof damage and 1,000 broken windows, and even cracked 19 bullet-proof windows. Baseball size hail was also reported south of Effingham.

May 26

- 1859: Severe weather in central Illinois produced several tornadoes during the late afternoon and early evening. The worst tornado touched down in Scott County near Manchester, then moving eastward, passing about 10 miles south of Jacksonville. The tornado was described by eyewitnesses as being balloon-shaped. 35 homes and many outbuildings were destroyed. 11 people died, and 50 were injured along the 12-mile path.
- 1917: A major tornadic thunderstorm tracked west to east across the state during the afternoon, as part of [Illinois' 3rd deadliest tornado disaster on record](#). Once believed to have produced a single tornado with a path 293 miles long, later study indicated it yielded 4 to 8 separate tornadoes. The first touchdown was about 20 miles southeast of Quincy. The tornadic storm tracked due east before beginning a southeast curve near Charleston. The tornado event lasted over 7 hours. The towns of Mattoon and Charleston bore the brunt of the storm. Damage from this severe tornado in Mattoon was about 2.5 blocks wide and 2.5 miles long, with over 700 houses destroyed, while the Charleston portion was 600 yards wide and 1.5 miles long, with 220 homes damaged. Damage in the two towns amounted to about \$2 million, in 1917 dollars. 64 people were killed in Mattoon, and 34 were killed in Charleston. Overall, 108 people in Illinois were killed during the tornado outbreak, with 638 injured.

May 27

- 1896: A tornado, which killed 137 people in St. Louis, moved across the Mississippi River and killed another 113 people in Illinois. The violent tornado severely affected the city of East St. Louis, where \$2 million damage occurred. The Eads Bridge, reported to

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be tornado-proof after it was rebuilt from an 1871 tornado, had a 2x10 inch plank driven through 5/16 inch wrought iron, but no significant damage occurred to the bridge. After lifting for a short time, the tornado touched down again near Mascoutah and moved northeast. The second touchdown killed 24 people and damaged 100 homes in Mascoutah. This stands as the 2nd deadliest Illinois tornado outbreak on record.

May 28

- 2014: A landspout tornado developed along a weak boundary north of Bloomington. While highly visible, it remained in open areas and caused no damage. A second landspout occurred southeast of Bloomington near Le Roy.

May 29

- 1982: Two major tornadoes occurred in southern Illinois. The more severe of the two touched down northeast of Carbondale, then moved through Marion. The tornado, ranked as an F4, had multiple vortices within the main funnel. Extensive damage occurred at the Marion airport. A total of 10 people were killed, with 181 injured. 648 homes and 200 cars were damaged or destroyed, with total damages around \$100 million.

May 30

- 2003: Several tornadoes touched down in central Illinois during the early evening. The strongest tornadoes moved across Logan and De Witt Counties. One touched down 4 miles north of Lincoln and moved to Hallsville in De Witt County, while a second tornado moved from Hallsville to southeast of Clinton. These two tornadoes caused an estimated \$10 million damage.
- 2005: After the unusually wet start to the year, drought conditions had begun to develop over Illinois. Statewide, the spring months amounted to the 4th driest spring on record. Rainfall in May was only 25 to 50 percent of normal, with moderate drought conditions developing over by the end of May. Princeville reported its driest spring on record, with only 3.85 inches of precipitation. Mattoon saw its second driest spring (4.75 inches), with rankings of 3rd driest at Peoria (4.16) and Havana (4.62).

May 31

- 1858: A tornado moved east across Warren County and devastated the town of Ellison, about 14 miles southwest of Monmouth. Only 3 cabins were left standing. 19 people were killed, with 60 injured, along the tornado's 5 mile track.
- 1934: Early season heat gripped central Illinois. Springfield reported its earliest triple-digit high temperature on record, with a temperature of 101 degrees.
- 1985: A dust storm occurred across the northern quarter of Illinois. Winds during the storm were 30 to 50 mph, with some gusts to 70 mph. Visibility in towns and cities was between 1 and 5 miles, but outlying areas near farm fields had local visibility less than 20 feet. Numerous accidents were caused by the low visibility, with one person killed and 22 injured. Soil erosion losses were estimated around \$3 million.