



NOAA, NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE, WEATHER FORECAST OFFICE

Miami, Florida 33165



*Heavy frost and steam rising from Caloosahatchee River in Moore Haven on December 28, 2010
(photo by Angie Snow, Glades County Emergency Management)*

**Friday February 15th:
Temperature Extremes and Wildfire Awareness Day**

Tornado Drill at 1010 AM

Although a mild and sunny climate is south Florida's greatest natural asset, extremes of heat and cold occur from time to time. These extremes can be harmful and even fatal if

people do not take precautions. The heat and humidity of summer can combine to cause temperatures to feel more like 105 degrees on many days, which present a significant health risk even to those used to warm weather. Heat index values rarely reach critical values of 110 degrees in south Florida, but when they do, the risk of life threatening heat stroke increases dramatically. It is not unusual to hear of cases of heat exposure involving school children, especially during the hot summer months when outdoor activities are more common. Heat-exposure-related incidents are notoriously under-reported and it's likely that many cases of heat exposure occur yearly in South Florida due to the persistent heat and humidity common throughout much of the year.

The number-one protection against heat exposure is simply to stay out of the heat, especially during the hottest times of the day. If outside, make sure to drink plenty of water and take frequent breaks in the shade.

Although you can't feel it or see it, ultraviolet radiation can cause damage to the skin and eyes, even on seemingly cloudy days or in shady areas. Ultraviolet radiation, or simply UV radiation, is strong most of the year in subtropical latitudes such as south Florida. The peak hours of UV radiation are normally between 10 am and 2 pm when a high sun angle allows much of the energy to penetrate to the surface. The body's quick response to excessive UV radiation causes sunburn, which can happen in only a matter of minutes. Prolonged or excessive exposure has been proven to cause potentially fatal skin cancer or cataracts, a form of blindness. About 90 percent of all skin cancer cases are linked to UV radiation. Put on sunblock, especially on children, when planning to be outdoors for a prolonged period of time.

In an area known for its mild winters, it's hard to imagine life-threatening cold, but freezing temperatures occur over at least parts of south Florida on a yearly basis. Recent cold snaps can attest to this. During the several record-breaking cold episodes of January and December 2010, freezing temperatures occurred over almost all of south Florida, impacting both people and crops. Two people died as a result of hypothermia in January 2010 and an additional 7 people were injured from carbon monoxide poisoning. South Florida's agricultural industry suffered losses in the millions of dollars as a direct result of the freezing temperatures.

Products such as freeze watches and warnings, and wind chill watches, warnings and advisories alert the public to the threat of potentially life threatening cold temperatures.

During cold events, be extremely careful when using heating devices as deaths often occur as a result of faulty equipment or from improper use. Never use candles or cooking grills indoors, and be very careful with space heaters. Check your heating equipment at least once a year to make sure it is in proper working conditions. Check on the elderly to make sure they have adequate heating. Protect pets and plants during significant cold episodes.

WILDFIRES

The dry winter and spring of south Florida means that our area is prone to prolonged periods of little to no rainfall. This increases the threat of wildfires which peaks during the spring months from March through May when the dry season coincides with increasing sun angle and warmer temperatures. With dry conditions being observed over all of the area so far this dry season, the wildfire risk will likely increase over the next several weeks. Therefore, all persons are strongly urged to follow the advice of forestry and fire safety officials to avoid causing wildfires. Many south Florida wildfires are the result of human activities. Be careful when discarding cigarettes, matches and barbecue coals and don't park vehicle in high grass where a hot catalytic converter or tailpipe can start a fire.

When conditions are conducive for the rapid spread of wildfires, the National Weather Service issues Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings which indicate the location and time of the greatest threat.

Information regarding extreme temperatures and weather conditions conducive to the spreading of wildfires can be obtained by visiting the National Weather Service Miami Forecast Office website at www.weather.gov/southflorida and clicking on the Local Hazards tab.

TORNADO DRILL

As part of Florida's Severe Weather Awareness Week, the National Weather Service and the Florida Division of Emergency Management will conduct a statewide tornado drill on Friday, February 15th. Schools, hospitals and businesses throughout south Florida are encouraged to participate by conducting a tornado drill at their individual location, putting their severe weather emergency preparedness plan into effect. This will give school administrators and safety officers an opportunity to see how effective their preparedness plan actually is. If your school or business does not have a severe weather preparedness plan, contact your county office of emergency management or the National Weather Service for assistance.

Here are the plans for the February 15th tornado drill:

At 800 AM, the tornado drill will begin when all of south Florida will be considered to be under a test tornado watch. No products will be issued at this time. This is the appropriate time to announce the watch to staff and students, assign coordinators and evacuate tornado vulnerable areas. All participants in the drill are urged to turn on their NOAA Weather radios shortly after 800 AM and be ready to activate emergency procedures once the test warning message is received.

At 1010 AM, a test tornado warning will be issued by the National Weather Service Miami Forecast Office for all counties in south Florida including Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Collier, Hendry and Glades. NOAA Weather Radio will broadcast the warning using the same routine weekly test code that is used for the weekly tests normally conducted on Wednesdays. Upon receipt of the message, the coordinator will determine the threat.

The watch and warning will terminate at **1030 AM**. No formal notification will be given by the National Weather Service to end the test warning.