

Severe Weather in the Springfield Area

While it is true that severe weather can occur during any month in central Illinois, the height of our storm season in the Springfield area is during April and May. 2008 aligned itself almost perfectly to this pattern with periods of active weather throughout the spring that culminated with our most intense storm striking on the evening of Friday, May 30. It was followed by a straight line wind event and wide spread flooding rain on the morning of Tuesday, June 3, after which our spring weather regime transitioned to calmer summer weather.

Our lone tornado of 2008 in Sangamon County occurred on Friday, May 30, in the rural area near Waverly. It was photographed by an observer who posted his pictures at Stormtrack.org. This was an EF1 tornado that damaged a residence and farm site on Caruthers Road.



Photo credit to Stormtrack.org by Skip Talbot

North of where the tornado dropped from this super cell, weather spotters with the New Berlin Fire Department were pounded by the largest hail we have had in the county over at least the past dozen years. A couple of the hail stones that were photographed exceeded 3 inches in diameter. That's bigger than a baseball!



Photo credit to New Berlin Fire Department by Larry Frank

Did you ever wonder why it is sometimes said that storm clouds look green before a tornado? That coloration is caused by the production of hail within the height of the super cell. Our Caruthers Road tornado was a textbook example of a thunderstorm in action.

As if one severe event was not enough for this weather system, it meandered across central Illinois all weekend and finally propelled itself out of here on Tuesday, June 3, when a squall line pushed through with a 64 MPH wind gust measured at Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport. This took down power poles north of Illiopolis late that morning.

This system generally put down between 6 and 7 inches of rain throughout the Sangamon River drainage basin. The river's crest at the Riverton gage was 26.97 feet on June 8. This is just a hair short of 4 feet above flood stage and was the ninth highest crest in over 100 years of data collection along this portion of the Sangamon River.

Even as the summer weather was more stable than what preceded it, July gave us one memorable event too. There was a deluge in the vicinity around and just northwest of Sherman from a stalled rain storm between midnight and 2:00 AM on Saturday, July 12. Reports from 3 different rain gages within the village, including a National Weather Service cooperative station, placed the precipitation total between 6 and 7 inches in this 2-hour span. Long dormant waterways became active that night channeling water to the Sangamon River and its feeder creeks. The force of the water moving in this flash flood circumstance was enough to wash away infrastructure built in its way.

Alerts and warnings for all of the severe weather events recounted here (tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, flooding and flash flooding) are available to anyone who has acquired a NOAA Weather Radio. These radios now come with Specific Area Message Encoding (S.A.M.E.) which allows you to program the code 017167 and only be alerted for Sangamon County events. Each county has its own unique code if you live elsewhere or wish to receive alerts for more than one county.

Everyone seems to carry a cell phone these days. For a small fee on your monthly bill you can attach your phone to an alerting service offered by one of the several major internet weather providers. These come to you as text messages which are great when you are on the go. The village of Chatham has even launched a free program to get such alerts to subscribers who sign up on the village Web-site.

We want you to be aware of the prospect for severe weather or other hazardous situations. There are many ways that this information can be accessed and the opportunities to do so seem to be increasing. Once you have been alerted, remember the safety rules that you have learned since childhood about how best to protect yourself.

The State of Illinois has taken an all-hazards approach to deliver this preparedness message. Check out the Web-site www.Ready.Illinois.gov for what you need to know before, during and after a storm or other emergency event.

By David Butt, December 8, 2008