

MARCH 2002: An active weather pattern highlighted the first month of meteorological Spring, yielding large variations in temperature and frequent precipitation. Temperatures averaged slightly above-normal with monthly departures between +1°F and +2°F at the three major airports. A period of unseasonably warm weather prevailed from the 6th -10th and again from the 14th -16th. On these days, daily temperatures averaged 6°F to 20°F above normal. The warm weather was often quickly replaced by much colder conditions. On the 17th & 18th, highs struggled into the forties after readings in the seventies a day earlier. There were two brief blasts of Arctic air, yielding highs only in the thirties (readings more typical of January) across the Washington/Baltimore area on the 4th and 22nd. There were six days with subfreezing lows, including the 5th when temperatures plummeted to 11°F at IAD and 19°F at DCA (the lowest temperature in Washington since December 26, 2000). As was the case during January & February but something more typical of spring, there were large daily temperature fluctuations with readings soaring nearly 40 degrees at some locations. On the 8th, temperatures rose from a morning low of 31°F to a high of 70°F later in the day at IAD.

Slightly drier than normal conditions prevailed across the local area despite frequent periods of rainfall. For most areas, it was the wettest month since late last summer. Monthly precipitation totals between 3 and 4 inches were common at many locations, but provided only limited relief to drought conditions impacting the local region. On the 2nd-3rd, nearly an inch of rain was observed at all three major airports (1.00" at BWI, 0.83" at IAD and 0.80" at DCA). Some locations reported more than an inch from this storm system. DCA recorded 0.77" of rain on the 2nd, yielding the largest daily rainfall since August 23, 2001. Precipitation totals between 0.50" and 0.75" were observed at many locations from the 12th-13th, 17th-18th, 19th-20th, and the 26th. Nevertheless, the long-term drought which has affected the area since September remained a major concern. According to press reports, the U.S. Geological Survey data indicate that groundwater levels in Maryland set record lows for March while water levels on the Potomac River were lower in March than have ever been recorded since monitoring began in 1931.

MARCH 2002 WEATHER STATISTICS FOR THE WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE AREA:

Station Location	Temperatures (°F)					Extreme/Day		Precipitation (In)			
	AvMx	AvMn	AvgT	NmIT	DepNml	MaxT	MinT	Total	Norm	DepNml	Yr-to-Date
National (DCA)	57.3	38.0	47.6	46.5	+1.1	80/15	19/5	3.37	3.60	-0.23	5.16
Baltimore (BWI)	55.7	34.3	45.0	43.7	+1.3	78/15	16/5	3.75	3.93	-0.18	6.20
Dulles (IAD)	56.5	34.1	45.3	43.4	+1.9	78/15	11/5	3.48	3.55	-0.7	5.17
Andrews AFB (ADW)	57.0	35.4	46.2	N/A	N/A	81/15	14/5	3.94	3.6	+0.3	6.47

LOOKING AHEAD TO APRIL: *The last freeze of spring?*

April is usually the last month when a 32°F or lower reading occurs in Washington until the following autumn. In fact, a freezing reading has never occurred in Washington in May, but that has not always been the case just outside of the city. Below is a list of the last date of a 32°F or lower reading at DCA and IAD for the last ten years. As one can see, this date can vary widely between the city and suburban locations.

DCA				IAD			
Year	Date of last 32°F or lower reading	Year	Date of last 32°F or lower reading	Year	Date of last 32°F or lower reading	Year	Date of last 32°F or lower reading
2001	March 28 (28°F)	1996	March 23 (32°F)	2001	April 26 (32°F)	1996	May 14 (32°F)
2000	March 19 (32°F)	1995	April 5 (30°F)	2000	April 14 (32°F)	1995	April 15 (29°F)
1999	March 23 (32°F)	1994	March 18 (31°F)	1999	April 25 (31°F)	1994	April 8 (29°F)
1998	March 25 (31°F)	1993	March 20 (29°F)	1998	April 13 (32°F)	1993	April 28 (32°F)
1997	April 10 (28°F)	1992	April 4 (31°F)	1997	May 8 (31°F)	1992	April 6 (30°F)

Latest 32°F or lower reading ever recorded in Washington: April 29 (1874)

Latest 32°F or lower reading ever recorded at IAD: May 17 (1984)