

SEPTEMBER 2003: September featured well above normal rainfall and near normal temperatures across the local area. All three major airports recorded monthly precipitation totals near or above 7 inches, resulting in surpluses of more than 3 inches for September. The month will long be remembered for the significant impact Tropical Storm Isabel. Hurricane Isabel came ashore around midday on the 18th near Drum Inlet, NC, with winds of 110 mph, a Category 2 storm on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane scale. Isabel moved northwest, weakening to a tropical storm, then accelerated near Charlottesville, VA, during the morning of the 19th. The storm then continued northwest into West Virginia and Pennsylvania, becoming an extra-tropical system in northeast Ohio by the 19th. The local region was battered by storm force winds with gusts near 60 mph, heavy rain bands dumping in excess of two inches in some areas, an unprecedented tidal surge of more than 7 feet in the Chesapeake Bay, and flooding along the Potomac River in Washington, DC, and Alexandria, VA. Isabel claimed two lives, one in Washington, DC, one in Anne Arundel County, MD, according to press reports. More than 500,000 customers lost power at the height of the storm and record flooding damaged numerous homes and businesses in Annapolis, MD. To the north, Baltimore slogged through its worst flooding in decades. Areas hit hard included the Inner Harbor, Fells Point, and eastern Baltimore County. Government, businesses and schools were closed for several days.

Barely 5 days after Isabel, another storm system brought torrential downpours with many locations recording rainfall totals above those generated by Isabel. Between 2.5" and 6.5" of rain inundated the area from the 22nd to the 23rd, resulting in flash flooding, evacuations of numerous homes and many road closures in Loudoun County, VA, according to press reports. Frederick County, MD, was particularly hard hit as heavy rains flooded and forced the closure of nearly 60 roads. In addition, 37 people were rescued from water-stranded cars, and a 110 foot sink hole near Interstate I-70 forced partial closure of the highway. On the 12th-13th, the remnants of Tropical Storm Henri drenched the region with well over an inch of rain. September marked the 4th month in 2003 with rainfall totals exceeding 7 inches. Many local sites recorded more than 50 inches from January-September 2003, making this year to date the wettest nine months since 1889 (see cover graphic).

Monthly temperatures averaged near normal at all three major airports. Officially, the average monthly temperature was down slightly, -0.1°F at DCA, marking the 7th month in 2003 with subnormal temperatures. There area recorded no 90°F temperatures. Most areas recorded their highest September temperature on the 1st, mid 80s, and lowest temperature the morning of the 30th when readings fell to the chilly 40s.

SEPTEMBER 2003 WEATHER STATISTICS FOR THE WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE AREA:

Station Location	Temperatures (°F)					Extreme/Day		Precipitation (In)			
	AvMx	AvMn	AvgT	NmlT	DepNml	MaxT	MinT	Total	Norm	DepNml	Yr to date
National (DCA)	77.8	63.1	70.4	70.5	-0.1	85/20	49/30	6.87	3.79	+3.08	48.35
Baltimore (BWI)	76.6	59.3	68.0	67.4	+0.6	85/1	43/30	7.47	3.98	+3.49	47.27
Dulles (IAD)	76.3	57.9	67.1	67.3	-0.2	86/1	40/30	7.27	3.82	+3.45	51.37
Andrews AFB (ADW)	78.0	61.0	69.0	N/A	N/A	86/7	45/30	6.60	3.60	+3.30	49.31

Other Occurrences:

LOOKING AHEAD TO OCTOBER: The first freeze!

October is usually the month when we think about the first frost or freeze in the Washington/Baltimore area, especially away from the cities. Below is a list of the dates of the first 32°F or lower reading during the last ten years at DCA and IAD, along with the earliest and latest freezes on record in Washington.

Year	First 32°F (or lower) reading		Year	First 32°F (or lower) reading	
	DCA	IAD		DCA	IAD
2002	November 27	October 18	1997	November 16	October 2
2001	December 22*	October 9	1996	November 12	October 12
2000	November 16	October 8	1995	November 5	October 17
1999	November 18	October 28	1994	November 24	October 11
1998	November 5	October 2	1993	November 2	October 1

Washington earliest freeze: October 10, 1895

* Washington latest freeze: December 22, 2001