

March 2004: Above normal temperatures with subnormal precipitation highlighted weather conditions across the Washington/Baltimore area. DCA, BWI, and IAD recorded monthly temperature departures of +2.3°F, +1.9°F and +2.9°F respectively. DCA marked 15 days with readings at or above normal. The first of two warm spells offered a taste of spring from the 1st-7th, yielding daily average temperatures between 8°F and 20°F above normal. Highs during the first week reached or exceeded 60°F daily and included three days (2nd, 5th and 6th) with readings in the 70s at DCA. Some locations observed their highest reading on the 5th when highs soared into the seventies (77°F at DCA). The second warm spell (25th-27th) was shorter, but produced 70°F+ highs each day at DCA. On the 26th, IAD reported a high of 78°F. As is normal in a transition month, chilly temperatures returned throughout the month. Highs remained in the 40s from the 8th-10th, 13th, 17th-18th, 22nd, and 30th across most of the local area. The month's lowest readings occurred on the 22nd-23rd as gusty northwest winds ushered in a blast of cold air from Canada. Readings dropped as low as 19°F at IAD and 21°F at BWI on the morning of the 23rd. Fortunately, there was little or no damage to early season flowers such as the cherry blossoms as most had not yet bloomed.

Monthly precipitation totals averaged between 2" and 3" across the area, resulting in rainfall between 1.25" and 1.50" at the three major airports. Only 2.05" of rain was recorded at DCA, yielding the driest March since 1987. At both BWI (2.73") and IAD (2.05"), it was the driest March since 1995. The month's major storm occurred on the 6th when a soaking rain developed early morning and ended by late morning. Cold air followed the heavy rain and ignited a sudden line of brief but severe thunderstorms across Maryland that swept eastward into Baltimore by mid-afternoon. The storms were accompanied by wind gusts to 60 mph that capsized a shuttle boat in the Inner Harbor, leading to four fatalities and several injuries, according to press reports. Before the strong winds reached Baltimore, surface wind gusts reached 47 mph in Frederick County, MD, and 53 mph in Howard County, MD and at DCA. Rainfall from the storm totaled well over an inch at BWI (1.31") and close to an inch at IAD (.96") and DCA (.85"). A rainy day on the 16th produced between 0.25" and 0.50" across much of the local area. There was no measurable snowfall across much of the area, marking the first February and March without measurable snowfall at DCA since 1998.

MARCH 2004 WEATHER STATISTICS FOR THE WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE AREA:

Station Location	AvMx	Temperatures (°F)				Extreme/Day			Precipitation (In)			Yr-to-Date
		AvMn	AvgT	NmIT	DepNmI	MaxT	MinT	Total	Norm	DepNmI		
National (DCA)	58.0	39.5	48.8	46.5	+2.3	77/5	26/23	2.09	3.60	-1.51	5.72	
Baltimore (BWI)	55.6	35.5	45.6	43.7	+1.9	75/26	21/23	2.73	3.93	-1.20	6.39	
Dulles (IAD)	57.5	35.0	46.3	43.4	+2.9	78/26	19/23	2.05	3.55	-1.50	5.71	
Andrews AFB (ADW)	58.0	37.0	47.5	N/A	N/A	79/5*	21/23	2.60	3.60	-1.00	7.14	

* Additional occurrence on 26

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
2003	April 1 (32°F)	1998	March 25 (31°F)	2003	April 1 (27°F)	1998	April 13 (32°F)
2002	April 7 (32°F)	1997	April 10 (28°F)	2002	May 22 (31°F)	1997	May 8 (31°F)
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)

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

Latest 32°F or lower reading ever recorded at IAD: May 22 (2002)