

DECEMBER 1996: After five consecutive months with subnormal temperatures in the Washington area, much milder weather prevailed during December. In fact, it was only the third month out of the last 14 with warmer than normal conditions at DCA. Monthly temperature departures topped +2.5°F at the three major airports and the departure of +3.6°F observed at DCA was the largest during any month since January 1995. There were 20 days with at or above normal temperatures and included 4 days when readings topped 60°F, three of which occurred during the last third of the month. There was only one, brief intrusion of Arctic air around the 19th which lasted only a few days, but prevented highs from topping the freezing mark on the 20th at DCA for the first time this winter.

Yet weather prevailed again with monthly totals topping 5 inches at all five airports. For some areas it was the eleventh month of 1996 with wetter than normal conditions including BWI and IAD. Measurable precipitation ($\geq 0.01''$) occurred frequently (14 days at DCA, 17 days at both BWI and IAD) across the area and included two days when daily totals topped an inch. On the 1st, a storm system tracked northeastward through the Ohio Valley, spreading heavy rain across the local area with totals over an inch recorded at the three major airports. On the 13th, another strong storm system moved up the Eastern Seaboard, dumping nearly 2 inches of rain across most of the Washington area and nearly 3 inches in Baltimore. The mild weather kept snowfall to a minimum with only 0.2" reported at DCA, the seventh consecutive December with subnormal totals.

DECEMBER 1996 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	Snow
National (DCA)	49.8	36.1	43.0	39.4	+3.6	66/29	20/21	5.51	3.12	+2.39	0.2
Baltimore (BWI)	47.8	31.4	39.6	36.7	+2.9	61/24*	11/21	6.78	3.41	+3.37	0.3
Dulles (IAD)	46.4	30.1	38.2	35.4	+2.8	63/1	11/21	5.20	3.22	+1.98	1.9
Ft. Belvoir (DAA)	50.9	33.7	42.3	N/A	N/A	68/29	14/21	5.63	3.3	+2.3	T
Andrews AFB (ADW)	48.1	32.3	40.2	N/A	N/A	66/29	14/21	5.43	3.4	+2.0	0.7

Other Occurrences: * December 29th and 30th.

ANNUAL 1996: Cool, wet and snowy weather highlighted the past year. As mentioned above, some locations across the Washington/Baltimore area recorded above normal precipitation nearly every month of 1996, producing near-record annual totals. Both BWI (58.33") and IAD (58.08") observed annual totals of nearly 60 inches, yielding the second wettest year on record at both locations. DCA reported a yearly precipitation total of 51.02 inches, the most since 1983 and the fifth largest amount since observations have been taken at the airport. The most noteworthy precipitation event to occur during the year was the "Blizzard of 1996" on January 6-8. This storm produced the largest single-storm snowfall totals at both IAD (24.5") and BWI (22.5") and the fourth largest snowfall in Washington (17.1"). The storm left most of the Washington/Baltimore area paralyzed all week and forced the closure of the three major airports, federal government, many businesses, and area schools. Additional snows on the 9th and 12th produced weekly totals exceeding four feet in some areas. A week later, a brief mild spell coupled with heavy thundershowers on the 18th and 19th generated rapid snowmelt and runoff and some of the worst flooding since 1972 along portions of the Potomac River. Raging floodwaters washed away large sections of the berms along the C&O Canal and caused millions of dollars in damage. Snowy conditions continued into February with all three of the major airports recording over a foot of snow and establishing new seasonal snowfall records at both BWI and IAD. Despite the large snowfall totals, February was the only month of the year with subnormal (liquid) precipitation totals at all three airports (DCA, BWI, and IAD) and the only such month at both BWI and IAD. The Spring commenced with wet and snowy weather as over 3.5" of liquid and over 5 inches of snow was recorded across most of the local area, pushing "snow-season" (October-April) totals to record levels at many locations including DCA (46.0"): the second snowiest season overall in Washington) and added to the already-established records at BWI and IAD. The final snowfall totals for the 1995-1996 season at both BWI and IAD topped 60 inches with 62.5" and 61.9", respectively. Wet weather continued throughout the remainder of Spring with seasonal precipitation surpluses of more than 2 inches common across the area. The summer was highlighted by much the same, but also featured several noteworthy events. Strong thunderstorms on June 11th generated up to 5 inches of rain across parts of the northern and western suburbs of Washington. About a week later, slow-moving thunderstorms dumped up to 7 inches of rain on parts of Washington, Frederick and Carroll counties in Maryland and over 1.3" in Gettysburg, PA, causing significant flooding. Severe weather erupted in late June as a "supercell" thunderstorm complex on the 24th spawned a tornado (F2) in Centreville, VA, resulting in significant property damage. In mid-July, the remnants of Hurricane Bertha moved east of the area, dumping 2-3 inches of rain locally. A week later, severe thunderstorms on 19th produced a powerful tornado (F3 - winds up to 206 mph) in Carroll County, MD (Gambers) causing extensive damage. From mid-August until early September the local area observed a 17-day period of precipitation-free weather, but this ended abruptly as the remnants of Hurricane Fran generated more than three inches of rain across parts of the local area (over a foot in the Virginia mountains), strong winds and induced severe flooding along numerous streams and rivers, including the the second major flood of the year locally. These rains combined with additional precipitation during the month produced the wettest September (7.79") in more than 20 years in Washington (second wettest at the airport). Above normal precipitation occurred on each of the final three months of the year and included: a strong Nor'easter and the remnants of Tropical Storm Josephine in October, a strong storm system on November 8th and two significant rain events during the first half of December.

Subnormal temperatures dominated most of the year across the Washington/Baltimore area. The persistent pattern of cool weather that began in November 1995 was only briefly interrupted in 1996. In fact, there were only three months (April, June and December) with warmer than normal conditions at DCA and of those only December yielded a monthly departure of more than +2°F. While Winter readings were near normal there were two short-lived, but intense cold spells. The first occurred in January about the time of the blizzard and produced subzero lows at IAD (-2°F) on the 9th. Even colder weather was observed in early February as the lowest readings of the year were observed at many locations on February 5th. Four of the five airports reported subzero readings, including a low of -10°F at IAD. Spring temperatures averaged below normal due in large part to a very cold March with monthly departures of -3°F (and lower) common across the area. The first warm weather of the year finally arrived in April as the first 80°F reading of the year was observed at DCA on the 12th. For the month though, temperatures were only slightly above normal. In May the first 90°F reading of the year in addition to the hottest weather of the year occurred during the end of the third week. Highs soared into the nineties on three consecutive days (19th-21st), including the hottest day of the year for many locations on the 20th. The summer commenced on a hot and humid note with monthly departures of slightly less than +2°F reported at most locations, but unusually cool conditions prevailed in both July and August. There were only 9 days with 90°F+ readings in July and 2 in August. Probably the most noteworthy temperature event of the year occurred during the peak of summer. From July 18 - August 21 (31 consecutive days) highs at DCA failed to reach 90°F, an extremely unusual occurrence since this is climatologically the hottest time of year in Washington. The summer produced only 17 days with 90°F+ readings at DCA (the fewest since 1972) and no days with highs of 95°F+ (the first such occurrence since 1971). Like the two previous seasons, cooler than normal conditions prevailed during Autumn with seasonal departures of -2°F common across the area. There were 58 days with subnormal temperatures with the most (24) occurring in November. September was cooler than normal for the seventh consecutive year at DCA, despite a hot beginning as readings soared near 90°F each of the first 10 days. By the first week of October, some suburban locations had recorded their first frost or freeze (31°F at IAD on the 12th). November was unusually cold, with monthly departures of -5°F (and lower) reported at the three major airports. The month also included some of the lowest November readings in five years for many locations as lows dropped into the teens on the 16th and again on the 28th. As the year ended, unusually mild weather enveloped the Washington/Baltimore area, producing the largest monthly temperature departures in almost two years at DCA.

ANNUAL 1996 WEATHER STATISTICS FOR THE WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE AREA:

Station Location	Temperatures (°F)					Extreme/Mth-Day		Precipitation (In)			
	AvMx	AvMn	AvgT	NmIT	DepNml	MaxT	MinT	Total	Norm	DepNml	Snowfall
National (DCA)	65.1	48.6	56.9	58.0	-1.1	96/5-20	5/2-5	51.02	38.63	+12.39	44.4
Baltimore (BWI)	63.7	44.0	53.8	55.1	-1.3	94/5-20	-1/2-5	58.33	40.76	+17.57	59.8
Dulles (IAD)	63.2	42.9	53.1	53.8	-0.7	93/5-20	-10/2-5	58.08	40.24	+17.84	58.4
Ft. Belvoir (DAA)	65.7	45.4	55.6	N/A	N/A	95/5-20*	-8/2-5	64.88	41.7	+23.2	53.1
Andrews AFB (ADW)	64.7	46.4	55.5	N/A	N/A	95/5-20#	-2/2-5	47.27	42.5	+4.8	57.5

Other Occurrences: * May 21st, June 21st & August 23rd; # May 20th.

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