

MARCH 1996: The first month of the meteorological spring provided much of the same weather as the winter: cold, wet, and occasionally snowy. Temperatures averaged more than 4°F below normal at both DCA and BWI, and it was also the fifth consecutive month with subnormal temperatures at DCA. There were 22 days with temperatures at or below normal at DCA. The month began on a chilly note with highs between 5°F and 10°F below normal from the 1st through the 4th before warming into the middle sixties on the 5th and 6th. These mild conditions were short-lived, however, as Arctic air enveloped the region after the first week. Highs on both the 8th and 9th (28°F and 30°F at DCA, respectively) never reached the freezing mark, and were more typical of normal mid-winter lows. Minimum temperatures during this period dipped into the low to mid-teens across most of the area and into the single digits (7°F) at IAD on the morning of the 10th. Strong winds accompanied the cold outbreak, producing wind chills of -10°F across the area on the 8th as these conditions were reminiscent of those following the “Storm of the Century” in March, 1993. In addition, this cold air mass produced record high March barometric pressure readings at some locations. Temperatures moderated within a few days, and highs rebounded to the sixties from the 13th-15th. The last half of the month featured much of the same with several days of cooler than normal conditions interspersed with a day or two of mild weather. A brief taste of spring occurred on the 25th as temperatures soared into the low 70’s, but three days later, highs were only in the thirties across most of the area, accompanied by heavy rain.

Precipitation and snowfall was above normal at all five airports as the result of three significant storms. Two early month storms generated more snowfall across the local region, adding to the already-established seasonal record snow totals. The first snow occurred on the 2nd with over three inches reported at BWI and lesser amounts of just over an inch around Washington. A period of unsettled weather from the 5th-8th added about one-third of the monthly precipitation total and included the second snowfall of the month. Between 3 and 6 inches of snow fell across the Washington/Baltimore area on the 8th, pushing seasonal totals to 46.0” at DCA (the second largest such total in Washington), 62.5” at BWI, and 59.1” at IAD (both all-time records). Another storm on the 19th generated heavy rainfall (over an inch at many locations) and was accompanied by strong winds and a few thunderstorms. This was the heaviest precipitation event since the “Blizzard of 1996” (January 6-8). Cold and rainy conditions (occasionally mixed with sleet in some areas) on the 28th produced more than an inch of precipitation at the five airports, and caused significant icing of trees and power lines in northern Maryland and portions of the Shenandoah Valley.

MARCH 1996 WEATHER STATISTICS FOR THE WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE AREA:

Station Location	Temperatures (°F)					Extreme/Day			Precipitation (In)		
	AvMx	AvMn	AvgT	NmIT	DepNm	MaxT	MinT	Total	Norm	DepNm	Snow
National (DCA)	51.8	34.0	42.9	47.2	-4.3	73/25	17/9	3.60	3.17	+0.43	5.2
Baltimore (BWI)	49.8	29.9	39.9	44.1	-4.2	73/25	11/9*	3.57	3.38	+0.49	7.6
Dulles (IAD)	50.9	28.5	39.7	43.2	-3.5	72/14	7/10	3.52	3.17	+0.35	6.0
Ft. Belvoir (DAA)	51.2	29.9	40.5	44	-3	72/25	12/4#	3.85	3.7	+0.2	7.0
Andrews AFB (ADW)	52.5	33.7	43.1	45	-2	74/25	16/10	3.81	3.6	+0.2	5.3

Other occurrences: * March 10th; # March 9th.

LOOKING AHEAD TO APRIL: *Another colder than normal month at DCA?*

For the last five months, subnormal temperatures have been reported at DCA. Will April turn out to be the sixth consecutive month? Looking back at the last ten Aprils, only three were warmer than normal (1994, 1991, & 1990). The most recent stretch of consecutive colder than normal months (6) was October 1993-February 1994. In addition, the last time a year started with four consecutive months with subnormal temperatures was in 1970.

Correction: Several copies of the February 1996 PRESTO that were disseminated contained an erroneous date (February 1995) on the front cover. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.