

70 Years Since 1953 Worcester Tornado Changed Severe Weather Warnings

Nearly 100 people died in the June 9, 1953, tornado. In its wake, the National Weather Service changed how it warns people about storms.

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Posted Thu, Jun 8, 2023 at 10:00 am ET



A memorial to the 94 victims of the 1953 Worcester tornado at Quinsigamond Community College, which stands on the former campus of Assumption College that was destroyed in the storm. (Neal McNamara/Patch)

WORCESTER, MA — On Tuesday, the National Weather Service office based in Norton flashed a series of storm warnings throughout the

afternoon as thunderstorms moved across the region from Winchendon to Marlborough to Plainville.

The storms were mild, but each warning was in some ways linked to a deadly storm that tore across Worcester and Middlesex counties 70 years ago.

The June 9, 1953, Worcester tornado left 94 people dead, destroyed the Assumption College campus and crushed a post office in Southborough. The F4 twister spewed debris as far east as Natick, the Blue Hills and Massachusetts Bay.

The storm was so deadly, according to the National Weather Service, in part because forecasters failed to predict the severe weather outbreak, which was linked to tornados that developed near Flint, Mich., that left over 100 people dead on June, 8, 1953. There was also no formal system allowing forecasters to communicate weather danger during the June 9 storm, preventing warnings from reaching local communities during the 90-minute event.

The storm led to the reorganization of the [Severe Local Storms Warning Center](#), a National Weather Service outfit that to this day issues severe weather risk predictions for every part of the U.S. — similar to the warnings seen earlier this week and Massachusetts, and ones sure to come as the summer progresses.

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Here's the track of the 1953 Worcester tornado:

Forecasters in the Boston met in the morning on June 9 to discuss possible severe weather coming to the state later in the day, according to the National Weather Service. The meteorologists decided against issuing a tornado warning to prevent "unnecessarily alarming" local residents. They opted instead to issue a severe thunderstorm warning about five hours before the tornado sprung to life.

The tornado began on the west side of Petersham over the Quabbin Reservoir around 4:45 p.m. A spotter at the observatory on top of the

Blue Hills in Milton began seeing debris falling from the sky around 5 p.m. The tornado was also captured by a radar at MIT swirling over Holden.

The weather service in Boston eventually issued the first-ever New England tornado warning at around 5:45 p.m. that day, just about the time the Worcester twister petered out near the Framingham-Ashland line.

The Worcester tornado was one of three that hit the region on June 9, 1952. Smaller tornadoes hit near Exeter, NH, and in a line from Sutton to Mansfield.

Although New England isn't on par with the Southeast or Great Plains states, Massachusetts sees about two twisters per year on average. Here are some of the other costly, deadly tornado events the state has seen:

- Aug. 28, 1973 — Three people killed near West Stockbridge in an storm that began in New York.
- Aug. 10, 1979 — Two Boy Scouts die in Paxton after a tornado hit their campground.
- May 29, 1995 — Three people killed in a tornado near Great Barrington.
- June 1, 2011 — A tornado that traveled from Springfield to Charlton left three people dead and caused \$228 million in damage.

Learn more about the 1953 Worcester tornado [from the National Weather Service](#).