

High-Tech Weather Tools

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Introduction

Fickle weather in the Chicago area can make keeping track of changes a challenge. Fortunately there are many tools available which can help.

Home Weather Gadgets

In most cases, weather gadgets provide localized information – what is happening at your specific location. LaCrosse Technology (lacrossetechnology.com) and Oregon Scientific (oregonscientific.com) are two well-known makers of these home weather gadgets.

- **Wireless thermometers** (\$15–\$50) are the simplest form of weather device. A remote sensor outside wirelessly transmits temperature information to an indoor display. Some units also measure barometric pressure.
- **Wireless weather stations** (\$70–\$300) measure numerous meteorological indicators, including: temperature, barometric pressure, air speed and precipitation. Advanced units connect to your home computer and allow you to store historical data and graph trends.
- **Weather radios** (\$20–\$75) provide on-demand information regarding current conditions and forecasts, but more importantly, they alert you to severe weather watches



LaCrosse Technology's WS-9020U-IT weather station (\$120) displays indoor and outdoor temperatures as well as relative humidity.

or warnings in your area. Battery-powered models provide peace of mind when your power goes out and severe weather is looming.

- **Portable weather devices** can be useful in outdoor pursuits. For example, some digital watches feature thermometers and barometers, such as Casio's Triple Sensor Pathfinder series (\$120-\$250, pathfinder.casio.com). If your outdoor needs include wind-speed measurement (e.g., for sailing, hang-gliding or kite-flying) a handheld anemometer like the La Crosse Technology EA-3010U (\$50) or Kestrel 1000 (\$100) can help.



An emergency weather radio keeps you informed of severer weather in your area.

Internet Appliances

Electronic devices such as the Chumby (\$120-\$150, chumby.com) and Sony Dash (\$200, sonystyle.com/dash) attach to your home's Wi-Fi network and run many small free applications. For a complete list of weather-related applications for the Chumby and Sony Dash visit chumby.com/guide.



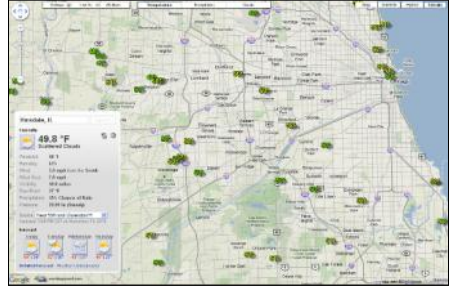
Email and Text Weather Services

Chumby Internet Appliances can run many free weather applications.

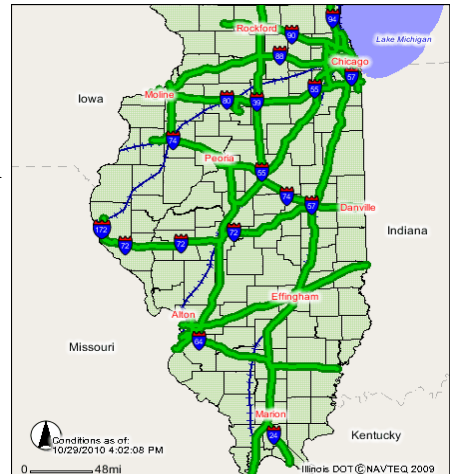
- **Umbrella Today** (umbrellatoday.com) is a simple service which tells you if it is likely to rain today in your area. If it is, Umbrella Today will send you an email or text message in the morning before you leave for school or work so you aren't caught unprepared.
- **Forecasts and Severe Weather Alerts via Email and Text:** some commercial websites will send you free daily forecasts and alerts to your email or mobile phone. **Accuweather** provides a handy email service (accuweather.com/alerts/index.asp). **The Weather Channel's** extensive text-message-based offerings include special alerts for pollen and icy precipitation (weather.com/mobile/textmessaging.html).

Weather Websites

- The **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)** website is a goldmine of weather information (noaa.gov/wx.html). NOAA even provides certified historical weather reports (helpful in supporting insurance claims) for a fee through its National Climatic Data Center (ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/about/ncdchelp.html).
- **Commercial websites** are another great source for weather information. Here are a few notable examples:
 - *weather.com*
 - *wunderground.com*
 - *accuweather.com*
 - *wxusa.com*
- The **Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)** has a handy winter-weather map (wrc.gettingaroundillinois.com/winterroadconditions/wrc.htm) showing current highway conditions and weather-related closures. Their site also provides links to similar maps in neighboring states in case your journey takes you outside of Illinois.



Most weather websites offer a radar map to aid in tracking storms. This full-screen weather map from Weather Underground is a great example (www.wunderground.com/cgi-bin/findweather/getForecast?brand=wxmap&query=60521)



Web Browser Add-Ons

If you use a customizable web browser like **Mozilla Firefox** (mozilla.com) or **Google Chrome** (google.com/chrome/), you can get weather information via an add-on. This information usually appears is in your browser's status bar at the bottom of the screen, and may include current conditions, forecasts, weather radar and even moon-phase information.

IDOT's winter-weather highway map can be invaluable in planning a road trip when snow or ice is likely.

Simply visit your browser manufacturer's website (addons.mozilla.org for Firefox or mychromeaddons.com for Chrome) and search for "weather."

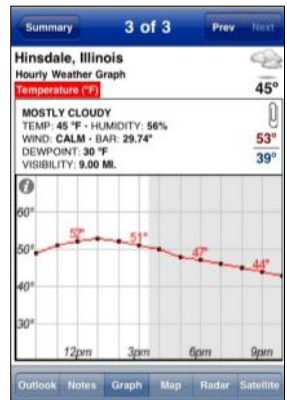
Smartphone applications

- The advent of smartphones like the Apple iPhone and the Motorola Droid makes getting up-to-date weather information at your location a simple matter. On the iPhone platform alone, there are over 100 weather-related applications (apps).

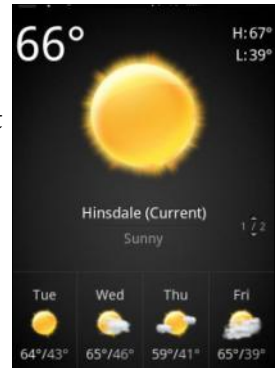
Conclusion

The days of relying on local television forecasts for up-to-date weather information are over. Today we have gadgets, websites, smartphone apps and weather messaging services to make it easier than ever to stay up-to date.

Forecasts, current conditions, highway closures and severe weather alerts are just a few of the types of weather information readily available. Happily, many of these resources are free with an Internet connection – putting them within the reach of most people. With any luck, you won't be caught without an umbrella or snow boots when nasty weather appears.



Wx Alert USA is one of dozens of weather apps for the iPhone.



The built-in weather application for Android-based smartphones tells you what you need to know at a glance.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email (moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info), or call me at 630.986.1976 ext. 225.

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