



State and local agencies work to ensure public safety around solar eclipse

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SPRINGFIELD – Excitement is building for a total solar eclipse that will be visible in a 70-mile-wide path in southern Illinois on Aug. 21. While crowd estimates vary, at least 145,000 people are expected to travel to the totality area in 18 southern Illinois counties to experience the rare celestial event and partake in dozens of eclipse-related events scheduled over a four-day period. Outside the totality area, people as far north as Chicago will be able to witness a partial eclipse.

Anticipating a high-level of interest in the eclipse, state and local public safety agencies and partner organizations began planning activities nearly a year ago to ensure safety for everyone before, during and after the eclipse.

“The planning efforts for the eclipse were similar to those we undertake for other events that involve large crowds,” said James K. Joseph, director of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA). “We began working with our emergency management partners within the path of totality last fall, as well as with our state agency and mutual aid partners to address every possible contingency in order to ensure the safety of everyone who lives in or visits southern Illinois for the eclipse.”

Joseph said planning efforts focused on many issues, including crowd control, public health and medical considerations, highway congestion, mass care and communications.

County and municipal agencies will be the lead within their jurisdictions. To facilitate coordination among response organizations, IEMA will establish a State Unified Area Command (SUAC) in Effingham, where representatives from the state departments of Transportation, Natural Resources, Public Health, Corrections, IEMA, the Illinois State Police, Illinois National Guard, fire, law enforcement and emergency management mutual aid organizations and the American Red Cross will be staged from Aug. 18-22.

Reporting to the SUAC will be Area Commands in Fairview Heights and Marion, where personnel will maintain close-range situational awareness of issues related to traffic, medical needs, cooling centers and other situations that may arise. Each Area Command will interact with response organizations in its nine-county area. In addition, IEMA personnel will deploy as needed to the local emergency operations centers of all of the major venues and where requested.

The National Weather Service in Paducah will have personnel in the Marion Area Command to provide regular weather updates for the entire 18-county area.

The State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) in Springfield also will be activated Aug. 18-22 to support the SUAC and the Area Commands. Representatives from agencies in the SUAC and Area Commands will staff the SEOC and be prepared to expedite deployment of personnel or resources if needed during that time.

Joseph said many state and local agencies are actively promoting steps people should take to stay safe throughout the event. Eye safety is one of the most critical messages because it is never safe to look directly at the sun – even if the sun is partly eclipsed. Permanent or temporary vision loss is possible from unprotected viewing of the eclipse. When watching an eclipse, people must wear eclipse glasses or use a solar viewer to face the sun. Make sure eclipse glasses or solar viewer meet the ISO 12312-2 international safety standard.

A list of manufacturers and authorized dealers of eclipse glasses and handheld solar viewers verified to be compliant with the ISO 12312-2 international safety standard is on the American Astronomical Society (AAS) [Reputable Vendors of Solar Filters & Viewers](#) website.

With thousands of people planning to view the total eclipse in southern Illinois, IDOT and ISP officials have been closely coordinating with local law enforcement to ensure key traffic areas are staffed and the public is receiving helpful information through digital message signs. People should plan ahead for longer travel times in the region due to the expected influx of people and should plan ahead.

IDOT and ISP officials also say people should plan to park in a designated parking area away from traffic. No one should pull over on the side of the road to view the eclipse. Drivers in areas with viewing events or prime viewing locations should expect high volumes of pedestrian and bicycle traffic and drive accordingly. Both agencies also recommends motorists keep headlights on throughout the day of the eclipse.