

# **C** Response Procedures – **Severe Winter Weather**

March 1, 2025

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to outline how Washington County will prepare for, respond to, and recover from severe winter weather emergencies.

This procedure defines how County staff will ensure that appropriate and coordinated response measures are implemented in a timely and effective manner. This procedure covers pre-season activities, monitoring, response, and recovery operations.

## 2. Concept of Operations

### 2.1 Terminology

- **Severe winter weather event:** An incident where low temperatures, high winds, precipitation (snow, sleet, ice, freezing rain), and/or any combination of those, threaten public health and safety, and response actions may be required to protect the public.
- **Warming Locations:** Any location available or activated before and during severe winter weather incidents to provide respite from the cold and other winter conditions. These locations are broken into three categories:
  - **Place to Get Warm:** An internally used distinction to describe a publicly accessible facility generally open and providing community services year-round. The public is encouraged to access these facilities during normal operating hours as needed to stay warm and access other non-warming needs such as device charging and public information.
  - **Daytime Warming Center:** A facility offering additional warming/changing services or extended hours in response to severe winter weather incident. Activation usually occurs at the request of a city or the County. These facilities are open to the public but are not open overnight.
  - **Overnight Warming Shelter:** A severe winter weather facility offering overnight warming services and sleeping accommodations in response to severe winter weather incident. Washington County Housing Services and partners often refer to these as Severe Weather Shelters.
- **ESSENCE:** Acronym for Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-Based Epidemics. A statewide software utilized by Washington County epidemiologists to capture detailed data on emergency department visits. Daily data, which includes demographic information, signs and symptoms presented, and assumed cause, is available after a 24-hour delay.

- **Winter Storm Warning:** An alert issued by the National Weather Service 0-36 hours before a storm where forecast is for winter precipitation meeting/exceeding warning guidelines and/or causing significant impact.
- **Winter Storm Watch:** An alert issued by the National Weather Service 36-48 hours before a storm where there is a 50% or greater chance of hazardous winter weather.



- **Winter Weather Response team:** Group of individuals tasked with coordinating and responding to winter weather emergencies. This group is made up of Washington County department/division representatives, city and special district partners, and others who may be identified and invited to regularly scheduled coordination meetings.
- **WebEOC:** Online application used by multiple agencies within Washington County to support situational awareness, damage assessment tracking, shelter location management, community lifeline status, and resource requests.

## 2.2 Pre-Winter Activities

- In the fall, Washington County Emergency Management (WCEM) and Land Use and Transportation (LUT) may coordinate internally and with partners to prepare for the upcoming winter. Preparation activities may include:
  - Receiving a seasonal outlook briefing from the National Weather Service.
  - Hosting a pre-season planning meeting.
  - Reviewing previous years' after action reviews (AAR) and improvement plans (IP).
  - Reviewing current website, social media, and community education resources regarding winter hazards and developing pre-season messaging and education campaigns.

- Coordinating with cities to gather and update the status of warming locations including availability, contact information, operating hours, and services provided; and ensuring information is updated in WebEOC and public facing websites.
- Review and update contact lists as necessary.

### 2.3 Monitoring and Initial Actions

- WCEM staff monitor National Weather Service (NWS) forecasts for indicators of hazardous winter weather including, but not limited to:
  - high winds (35 mph+ or more),
  - ice accumulation
  - Snow, sleet, or freezing rain, and
  - low temperatures (2+ days at below freezing temperatures).
- If a watch, warning, weather briefing, or wintery conditions forecast predicts low temperatures, high winds, snow or ice accumulation, or any combination thereof that may threaten health and safety, then WCEM will consult with Washington County Public Health (WCPH), LUT, and Washington County Housing Services (WCHS) to assess risks and determine if any response actions are needed.
- Other agency representatives can be added to Unified Command as needed.
- Representatives from these four departments will assess the weather forecast, NWS products, and public health risks. The factors being assessed include, but are not limited to:
  - level of forecast certainty
  - overall duration of forecasted winter conditions
  - proximity and duration of recovery periods (e.g., periods of warmer temperatures before or after another severe winter weather event)
  - probability of impacts to power, transportation, etc.
  - potential impacts to vulnerable populations, including but not limited to children, older adults, people with disabilities or underlying medical conditions, outdoor workers, and people who may be homebound with limited access to heating, precariously or underhoused, or experiencing homelessness
  - activation levels and response actions of neighboring counties
  - other conditions anticipated to overwhelm available resources
- If response is needed, or if the forecast is likely to worsen, WCEM will schedule a countywide coordination call. The coordination call may be cancelled if the weather forecast improves, or the response team decides it is no longer necessary.

- WCEM will be responsible for communicating with and providing updates to internal and external partners throughout the monitoring and response phases. See below (section 2.4) for more details.

## 2.4 Notification

- WCEM will send severe winter weather forecast, activation, and response notifications to County leadership, County staff with a response role, city and special district partners, warming center operators, and countywide emergency management partners.
- Internal programs, cities, and special districts may further distribute the notifications through their distribution channels.

## 2.5 Coordination and Situational Awareness

- The County’s response to severe winter weather events is led through a unified command with representatives of WCEM, WCPH, LUT, and WCHS.
- Unified Command will determine an appropriate meeting cadence and schedule countywide preparation and response coordination calls, facilitated by WCEM. The coordination calls may occur on weekends and holidays as needed.
- The countywide coordination call will focus on operational updates and response needs, including:
  - Situational awareness (weather forecasts, impact areas, potential/occurring damage, resource availability, etc.) and risk assessment
  - Preparation and response coordination
  - Road status and operations
  - Emergency department visits and EMS calls
  - Public information
- Additional coordination actions, like the Joint Information System (JIS), tactics meetings, or city specific activities, may occur based on response needs.
- Washington County Emergency Management will appoint a response team member as liaison to power providers to monitor outage information, maintain situational awareness of response activities, and support escalation of restoration needs.
  - When possible, information shared between power providers and the liaison should include, but is not limited to:
    - Likelihood of outages
    - Location and scale of outages

- Estimated and actual restoration times
- Critical facilities within Washington County needing restoration
- Basic contact information for power provider customers requiring additional support or case management
- WCEM will gather situational awareness information and distribute to County leadership, County staff with a response role, city and special district partners, warming center operators, and countywide emergency management partners.
  - Information shared between responders and partners should include, but is not limited to:
    - General status of responding agencies, including staff and resources
    - Response activities, including priorities, objectives and timelines
    - Public health/safety impacts: cold-related illness trends and outbreaks, impacts to vulnerable populations and workers, etc.
    - Warming center status including utilization, population, and issues/concerns.
    - Secondary impacts such as power outages, media/public concerns, etc.
    - Service and facility closures, curtailments, and disruptions: e.g., event cancellations, water restrictions/conservation, prioritization of public safety and other services, etc.
    - Requests for support and cases requiring additional coordination and/or case management
    - Road Closures
    - Community lifeline impacts
    - Expected duration of current outages/impacts
    - Potential (high likelihood or high consequence) risks and status of contingency plans and/or resources

## 2.6 Response Activities

- Washington County and its response partners may take a variety of actions to protect the community and property depending on the duration and severity of winter conditions.
- Unified Command is responsible for determining what response actions to take and should regularly check to make sure those activities are adequately meeting community and infrastructure needs. The response activities include, but are not limited to:
  - Preparing, maintaining, and clearing roadways (2.6.1)
  - Establishing warming locations (2.6.2)
  - Addressing community needs (2.6.3)



- Issuing public information and alerts and/or warnings (2.6.4)

### 2.6.1 Road Operations

- In advance of forecasted winter weather, LUT:
  - will determine staffing needs and deploy resources to support clearing and keeping roads safe.
  - may deploy critical equipment throughout the county to support operations.
  - will report road impacts to LUT Dispatch, as needed.
  - coordinate with 911 dispatch on road conditions and closures to support emergency response.
- The response team's Utility Liaison will work with LUT to escalate issues to power providers, such as trees on powerlines.

### 2.6.2 Warming Locations

- WCEM, WCHS, city emergency managers, and other response partners will monitor community needs to determine if/when warming locations are needed. When possible, the decision to open warming locations will be made at least two business days before they are needed.
  - WCHS maintains a severe winter shelter plan with thresholds for activation (maintained and stored separately from this plan).
- Factors that may inform the activation of warming centers and shelters include:
  - Duration of power and natural gas outages.
  - The extent of the winter weather and associated risks
  - Geographic distribution and accessibility (e.g., proximity to mass transit) of warming centers and spaces, particularly by vulnerable populations
  - Capacity, entry requirements, available services, and general conditions of open warming centers and shelters
  - Availability of public transport and other safe and low/no-cost means of transportation to and from critical services
  - Availability of animal-friendly spaces
- If daytime warming centers are needed, WCEM and cities will reach out to warming space providers to inquire about additional hours and services and identify any support needed
- If a warming location is animal friendly, WCEM will connect the facility lead with WC Animal Services for resources and support.

- The agency that activates a warming center will be responsible for site identification and volunteer and supply management and will coordinate with the emergency manager of the location's jurisdiction.
- If centers or shelters are needed in addition to what partners are able to provide, WCEM will evaluate the need and feasibility of a WCEM activated/managed space. WCEM will pay special attention to areas experiencing power outages and ensure a warming center is available in that area.
- Warming location data will be captured and maintained in WebEOC. Publicly accessible locations will be advertised on a public-facing map, a printable list maintained by WCEM, and County website and social media pages as determined by the PIO response team.

### **2.6.3 Community Needs and Support**

- 211, PGE, and 911 all field questions from the community regarding the situation and available resources/services.
  - Washington County can support these call centers by addressing individual caller needs (when referred), sharing information about available resources to call taker managers, and/or setting up its own public inquiry center to reduce call burden.
  - WCEM will maintain a centralized database of community needs shared by these and other partners to track need location, responder assignment, and resolution.
- Several Washington County Health and Human Services (HHS) divisions and programs complete welfare checks as part of their normal operations. The frequency, method, and depth of wellness checks differs based on program.
  - Welfare checks may be initiated or coordinated through the Community Services Branch (CSB).
- Several community health organizations conduct welfare checks of their clientele.
  - WCPH will coordinate with these organizations as needed throughout winter events to gather information and support resource needs.
- Community members may call 911 or non-emergency to request a welfare check. Response to requests to non-emergency dispatch may be delayed.
  - 911 is appropriate to use for immediate life and safety concerns; for any other concerns community members should utilize the non-emergency number.
  - Wait times to connect with a 911 or non-emergency dispatch operator may be longer than usual due to the severe winter weather.

- Dispatch will triage calls based on severity and assign responders as resources become available

## 2.6.4 Public Messaging and Alerts/Warnings

### 2.6.4.1 Public Messaging

- The Washington County Cold Weather ([www.wcor.us/StayWarm](http://www.wcor.us/StayWarm)) page is used to share cold-related illness and injury prevention information, and shelter locations.
  - The HHS and PH PIOs will be responsible for updating the content of the Cold Weather page.
  - WCEM will be responsible for updating the interactive shelter map and printable list.
- Washington County may decide to activate the Current Incident page to share information about storm impacts, available resources, recovery resources, and other information not addressed on the Cold Weather page. The current incident page will direct to the Cold Weather page.
- Depending on the severity of the storm and public information needs, the County website's homepage may be updated with a link to the Current Incident or Cold Weather page or may post an announcement that's added to the entire website.
- Washington County will use its social media platforms to share information about risk reduction and warming locations with the public.
  - WCEM is responsible for posting weather-related safety information in safe harbor languages on Facebook.
- Data from ESSENCE reports, responder experiences, and anecdotal reports may be used to determine applicable messages.
- LUT maintains road status on [www.wc-roads.com](http://www.wc-roads.com)
- County programs and other response partners may utilize other means of outreach to share public information about severe winter weather with the communities they serve.
- Regionally developed and translated critical severe winter weather messages are available to support multi-lingual emergency communication.  
[www.publicalerts.org/messaging-tools](http://www.publicalerts.org/messaging-tools)
- Any press release needed to support response will be written and released by the PIO subject matter expert with support as needed from other PIOs. For example, a news release specific to houseless warming shelters will be written and issued by WCHS.

### 2.6.4.2 Alerts and Warnings

- If news media, social media, weather watches and warnings, and other public information pathways are not sufficient to adequately notify the public, WCEM, WCPH, and WCHS may direct the use of alert and warning systems.
  - These systems allow for the emergency notification of the public via email, text message, voice message, and other channels.
  - In addition to considering the adequacy of public information methods, WCEM, WCPH, and WCHS should consider how effectively critical information is being received by at-risk populations.
- The thresholds listed on the next page will be used as a starting point for when to issue an emergency alert.
- WCEM or other Unified Commanders may determine an emergency alert is needed outside of these thresholds and may also decide not to issue an alert when a threshold is reached.
- The region's alerting authorities may decide a regional alert is needed to support life safety. WCEM will participate in the regional discussion, decision, alert creation, and issuance.

Washington County Emergency Hazard Alerting Thresholds: Winter Weather

Notification Category	Thresholds	Message Topics	Target Contact Methods											
			Text Message	Phone Call	Email	TTY/TDD	Social Media	Website	NWS Radio	WEA	EAS	Resident Connect	Opt-Ins	
	<b>Note:</b> each numbered point in criteria is a different threshold. You do not need to have all criteria happening to meet the threshold for sending the alert.													
Notification – Advanced Notice	<b>Criteria:</b> 1. 3+ days of below freezing temperatures 2. High probability of 1+ inch snow fall <b>Timing:</b> 1 day before onset; daytime only (limited between 8am-4pm)	General Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to prepare</li> <li>cold related illnesses</li> <li>Transportation safety</li> <li>Stay warm inside</li> <li>Pets</li> </ul>	x		x	x	x	x						X
Notification – Advanced Notice	<b>Criteria:</b> 1. High wind warning or watch with high degree of confidence (50%+) 2. High degree of confidence of .25+ inch ice accumulation 3. 25-35 MPH wind gust AND .25+ inch ice accumulation <b>Timing:</b> 1-2 days before storm; daytime only (limited between 8am-4pm)	Power Outage potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to prepare for power outages</li> <li>Make a plan</li> <li>Connect with neighbors/family</li> </ul>	x		x	x	x	x						X
Notification – In the storm	<b>Criteria:</b> 1. Accumulating impacts 2. Snow turning to sleet/ice 3. Issuance of additional watch/warning <b>Timing:</b> daytime only (limited between 8am-4pm)	Accumulating Impacts; could vary based on impacts but would include something related to cold-related illnesses; transportation safety; and going to somewhere warm	X		X	X	X	X						X
Public Safety – In the storm	<b>Criteria:</b> 1. Clear gap of information 2. Prolonged (3+ days) power outages 3. Extended (5+ days) freezing/cold temps 4. Extended activation of warming/charging shelters 5. High counts of cold-related ED visits and EMS calls <b>Timing:</b> During weather/storm; daytime or early evening (limited to 8am-8pm)	Get to warming shelter to stay safe	x		x	x	x	x		x		X	x	
Imminent Threat	<b>NOT USED FOR WINTER STORMS</b>													

### 2.6.5 Demobilization

- Based on the NWS forecast, WCEM will recommend an end date and time for warming centers and shelters during a countywide coordination call. Once agreed upon by responding partners, facilities will be asked to remain open until that time.
  - This date may be changed based on the forecast.
    - i. If the weather changes over the course of the severe winter weather event warming centers and shelters may be asked to remain operational longer.
    - ii. If the weather is improving, facilities are experiencing low usage rates, and/or are interested in closing, may be recommended closure at the end of that day's posted hours (for warming centers only) or after 24 hours to provide enough notice to current guests (for overnight shelters).
- Any resources loaned to a warming center or shelter will be collected following the closure date by whichever County program initially coordinated the loan.
- WCEM will save copies of the warming center map to the incident records.

## 2.7. Recovery

- WCEM will host at least one recovery focused coordination call at the end of response to determine the level of recovery operation activation needed.
- Recovery following severe winter weather, may include, but is not limited to: debris management, FEMA Individual Assistance/Public Assistance, continued road clearing/clean up, and public program information sharing (ie: SNAP replacement).
- The Current Incident page will be updated after the severe winter weather to share recovery information.

## 3. Organization and Assignment of Responsibilities

### 3.1 Washington County Emergency Management

- Coordinate with warming location providers and operators and maintain updated information on days/hours of operations and rules. If escalation is needed, support activation and operation of warming shelters.
- In consultation with WCPH, LUT and WCHS, assess weather forecasts and health and safety risks to determine response actions.
- Notify and coordinate internally with the HHS PIO, public health, DAVS, housing services, animal services, facilities (for County facility needs), LUT, leadership, and other programs involved in response.

- Coordinate with the CAO PIO to post information about resources and response activities on Horizons to inform departments that may receive calls/requests for information or want to proactively push information to the communities they serve.
- WCEM manager or designee will serve as lead unified commander and schedule/lead coordination calls.
- Coordinate externally with cities, special districts, private, and regional response partners.
- Develop, issue, and manage a list and map of participating warming spaces.
- Support the development of news releases.
- Provide situation updates and reports to partners.
- Lead an evaluation of the response following an incident.
- Coordinate transition to recovery operations, if any

### **3.2 Land Use and Transportation**

- Participate in Unified Command
- Coordinate road operations
- Activate snow chain zones as needed
- Maintain wc-roads.com to report closure and other road condition information
- Develop and issue news releases and social media related to response operations, travel safety, and snow chain zones
- Coordinate or assist in debris management operations.
- Provide situational updates on road conditions and closures.
- Assist in damage assessment.

### **3.3 Housing Services**

- Manage emergency activation of WCHS service providers as needed
- Coordinate encampment outreach before and during severe winter weather events. Conduct welfare checks and share severe winter weather illness and warming center related information at houseless encampments.
- Coordinate activation and operation of warming shelters as needed, including transportation.
- Request and coordinate distribution of supplies as needed

### 3.3 Health and Human Services

#### 3.3.1 HHS and PH PIOs

- Issue news releases that include appropriate health messaging.
- Include link to the Cold Weather Information webpage on the HHS website in news releases and social media.
- Update and maintain information on the HHS website and social media.
- Coordinate with EM to post information on Horizons (i.e., County intranet).
- Participate in regional coordination efforts and align messages with neighboring counties.
- Ensure information issued is available in as many languages as possible to support people with limited English proficiency. At minimum, information should be provided in English and Spanish. Responders should utilize the [regionally translated severe winter weather messages](#) to provide information for other Safe Harbor languages.

#### 3.3.2 Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP)

- Partner with WCEM to determine when a severe winter weather activation should occur.
- Represent PH during internal severe winter weather coordination calls.
- Participate in external coordination calls as necessary.
- Coordinate MRC volunteer requests.

#### 3.3.4 Research, Analytics, Informatics and Data (RAID)

- Monitor ESSENCE data for severe winter weather-related illnesses and inform Public Health Emergency Preparedness.

#### 3.3.5 Disability, Aging and Veteran Services (DAVS)

- Provide severe winter weather related resource and response information to partner agencies/organizations.
- Conduct welfare checks on clients as necessary
  - Escalate issues to winter response team as needed

#### 3.3.6 Animal Services

- Provide HHS PIO with information regarding severe winter weather-related illnesses in animals and tips for caring for animals in severe winter weather.



- Provide guidance to warming locations to help them accommodate pets and pet owners and provide them with necessary resources. (i.e., pet supplies)
- Conduct welfare checks for animals and provide education to pet owners for animals left outdoors in severe weather without minimum care standards.

### **3.4 County Administrative Office**

- Lead public information efforts
- Provide information to employees about building status and safety tips.
- Coordinate with Unified Command to provide updates to the Board of County Commissioners.

### **3.5 External Agencies**

#### **3.5.1 Cities**

- Participate in coordination calls and coordinated response efforts
- Support public information efforts
- Support public protection strategies such as warming centers/shelters
- Share information about community needs (individual or themes) with WCEM

#### **3.5.2 Washington County Consolidated Communications Agency (WCCCA)**

- Manage 911 and non-emergency dispatch
- Share information about community needs (individual or themes) with WCEM
- Work with LUT, utilities, and special districts to support dispatch of their services

#### **3.5.3 Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District (THPRD)**

- Participate in coordination calls and coordinated response efforts
- Support public protection strategies such as warming centers/shelters
- Share information about community needs (individual or themes) with WCEM

#### **3.5.4 Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue (TVFR)**

- Participate in coordination calls and coordinated response efforts
- Share information about current response operations, priorities, and potential impacts to operations
- Coordinate with WCCCA to triage and/or respond to weather related community needs

### **3.5.5 Utility Providers**

- Participate in coordination calls and coordinated response efforts
- Coordinate site access and clearance activities with County and city road departments
- Share information about current and potential impacts and timelines for restoration of services

## **4. Procedure Testing and Maintenance**

If there is bandwidth, WCEM or WCPH will conduct a pre-season discussion-based exercise focused on severe winter weather. These TTXs may focus on internal or external County coordination and response.

For the first three years of this procedure (2025-2028), this plan will be reviewed and updated annually. After the initial three years, this procedure will be reviewed and updated every three (3) years.

WCEM is responsible for conducting the review/update with the support of LUT.