

SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN

September 2020

September is National Preparedness Month



As leaders of public agencies, your communities rely on you for many essential services such as emergency response, snow removal, and maintaining facilities in a ready and safe condition. With that role, comes great responsibility to ensure the agency's equipment and personnel are ready for a disaster or large-scale event. **Preparedness starts with having a plan for the department, and the department's workers and their families while you work to restore your agency's services and facilities.** Workers need to know their families and homes are taken care of before they can focus on their safety and the restoration of the community. This Bulletin

offers tips to prepare for severe weather events, such as snowstorms and hurricanes.

Employers

Public agencies must make plans to prepare for severe weather events. While police, fire, public works, and other departments are prepared to assist their communities, they must also prepare for the possibility that they may be affected by the event. The Safety Director reminds department leaders of their obligation to prepare their agencies, so their agency can be there to protect others. Now is the time to prepare your facility, equipment, personnel, and business infrastructure for the possibility that you will be the one in need. Consider the following steps:

Discuss claim reporting procedures with your risk manager. Make sure there is a clear reporting procedure from the person finding the storm damage, to the department's representative, to the Fund's Claim Representative. Work with your Risk Consultant to identify possible insurance gaps and discuss other areas of vulnerability.

Develop a Loss Management or Business Continuity Plan. Identify the department's critical functions and infrastructure. Create mutual aid pacts and vendor lists to provide those services, or replace affected infrastructure if lost to stormwater or wind. Take pictures of buildings and essential equipment. Safeguard vital records.

Develop salvage response plans. Protect your property from further damage wherever possible by restoring fire-protection systems, repairing leaks, providing temporary support and restoring power.

Have a written plan for critical tasks. If a facility is in a historically vulnerable area, consider relocating personnel and equipment before the storm hits.

Prepare facilities & grounds. Survey the grounds and exterior of the building for loose objects and properly secure. Tape or board up windows. Trim trees from around buildings. Gather mitigation resources such as sandbags, food & water, personal sundry items plastic sheeting & duct tape, extra mops, squeegees, etc. Make sure gasoline or diesel generators' fuel tanks are full. Secure sheds and other outbuildings. Make sure utility shut-offs are labeled and locations are known by occupants.

Prepare equipment. Fill vehicle fuel tanks. Know where to get extra fuel if electric fuel pumps go down. Perform routine maintenance on saws, pumps, etc. Sharpen blades. Buy extra blades and chains.

Prepare your personnel. Workers must be trained to properly respond to storm conditions. Encourage them to have Go Bags packed. As the storm nears, remind workers to sleep, eat, and hydrate themselves in preparation for potentially extended and strenuous work periods.

Help prepare workers' families. Essential personnel cannot be available or effective if their families are not taken care of. Leaders must work with Administration, Human Resources, banks, Red Cross, etc. to make sure families are safely evacuated and cared for well ahead of the approaching storm.

Employees' Homes

Like workplaces, the homes' of public employees must also be ready for weather events when they may be called to duty, potentially for extended periods of time. The severe weather season starts with the Hurricane Season in June and continues through the winter snow season. During cool fall weather is a good time to prepare homes for the upcoming severe weather season.

Clean gutters and downspouts. Make sure drainage is provided from the downspouts to a safe location.

Get snow shovels out of storage and check they are in good shape. Purchase ice melt and replacement shovels now. If a snow service is contracted, verify service plan meets the family needs while the employee is away servicing the community.

Check and service home mechanical systems. This can include furnaces, emergency generators, and sump pumps. Look for tree limbs overhanging electrical supply wires to the home and have them cleared. Know where the shut-offs are. Label them and educate another responsible family member of their location and use.

Check insurance coverages. An agent can clearly explain coverages and exclusions. Ask some, "What if . . ." questions to check understanding. Make sure adult members of the household understand immediate payment procedures for home repairs or relocation for the family if something were to happen while you are unavailable.

Post important phone numbers and save them to cell phones of family members. Include friends, family, neighbors who can help in an emergency. Also, include emergency and routine service companies for furnace, electrical service, plumbing, etc.

When a severe weather event is forecasted:

- Order home heating or cooking fuel (such as oil or propane) deliveries
- Check flashlights and weather radio, and have spare batteries
- Survey the exterior of the home and secure loose items, such as lawn furniture and trash containers
- Keep cell phones fully charged

Employees' Personal Vehicles

Most employees need to use their personal vehicles to get to work. After they leave, spouses and children may be using additional household cars to shop, go to school, etc. Personal vehicle and other vehicles in the household should be kept in good operating condition.

How old are the batteries? Are they ready for the coldest days, when you may be called in to plow streets?

Are the defroster and heater working properly? Are windshield wipers in good condition?

Add emergency equipment to vehicles; ice scraper, kitty litter / salt, blanket, flashlight, and snack food.

Have a conversation with other drivers in the household. Employees are most likely to have had some training and experience driving in inclement weather. Remind others, especially inexperienced drivers, of best practices when driving in storms, snow / ice, flooded roads, when to stay with vehicle and when to leave, etc.

When a severe weather event is forecasted:

- Fuel all vehicles
- Double-check the above list of items

Employees' Families

During inclement weather events, schools and daycare centers may be closed. If the spouse works, this can create a dilemma. Make multiple provisions for children, or other household members with supervision needs. Even if the spouse does not work, ensure you both have time to sleep while the children are being supervised.

When a severe weather event is forecasted:

- Make sure there is adequate food, including some that does not have to be heated, for a couple of days.
- Verify emergency contacts numbers and availability. Make back-up communication plans if primary contact numbers or cell systems are affected.

- Check supply of medications for family members. It may be difficult to get to an open and stocked pharmacy for a couple of days.
- Check critical medical supplies and equipment for family members. Oxygen and other healthcare deliveries may be delayed.

The Individual Employee

With the above preparations complete, employees should be able to concentrate on their welfare as they perform the difficult work of response and recovery from a large scale event. This is especially important because these tasks are unusual, which makes them more risky. They can go on for several extended shifts, making fatigue a factor, which again raises the risk. Employees need to be able to focus on their safety.

Recovery efforts, such as working in flood waters, may present health hazards different than routine duties. Keep your tetanus-diphtheria, influenza, and other vaccinations up to date.

When a severe weather event is forecasted:

- Inspect personal protective equipment. Replace missing or damaged gear. Pack spare gear and clothing.
- Get rest. New Jersey's Maggie's Law makes it a criminal offense if a driver is awake for longer than 24 hours and causes a traffic fatality.
- Eat a healthy, light meal. Pack snacks for the potential extended periods of work.
- Do not consume alcohol if there is a chance you will be called to respond.
- Pack personal medications and any special dietary needs. It may be difficult to break away from response / recovery efforts to take medications, etc.

There are several resources available:

OSHA provides a risk assessment matrix for hurricane response and recovery at www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/hurricane/

FEMA also has several excellent resources for individuals and governmental agencies at www.ready.gov/business/index

The New Jersey Office of Emergency Management has resources for individuals and local governments at www.ready.nj.gov/

The American Red Cross provides tools, resources, and classes for families, workplaces, and community at www.redcross.org/