

SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN

February 2021

Best Practices for Snow Emergencies

During the winter months, public agencies in New Jersey must plan to protect their workers and community from accidents occurring on icy surfaces. The following guidelines are offered as suggestions when planning for emergency operations presented by winter storms. Every storm event is different and municipal needs and resources will vary. This document offers best practices that have been identified by our members regarding hours of operation, rest breaks, and rotating schedules for before, during, and after snow events.

Pre-Storm Operations

- **Chain of Command**
 - Identify who will hold command staff positions. Plan for at least two persons for each command staff position to staff the command center around the clock for the first day or two for major snow events.
 - Develop a written snow plan with defined roles and hierarchy.
 - Verify emergency contact information.
- **Staffing**
 - Supplement crews with backups, including contractors, utilities, fire department, and per diem drivers.
 - Consider developing a list of retired CDL drivers you might call upon.
 - Consider areas that may require the use of contractors with specialized equipment i.e. cul-de-sacs.
 - Consider having departments clear their lots if possible; i.e. fire departments and utilities.
- **Shift Work Planning**
 - Remind workers of the need to prepare their homes and families for their absence during the emergency.
 - Consider sending workers home early in anticipation of call back e.g. sending a crew home if a storm is predicted to begin during the night. May be treated as “excused absence.”
 - Consider shifts of 12 hours of continuous operation (with allowances for meal breaks and periodic rest periods); followed by 6 hours of downtime. Under extreme conditions, entities may need to extend to, but should not exceed 18 hours.
- **Plan for Rest Breaks/Sleeping Accommodations**
 - Entities may need to encourage drivers to stay at municipal facilities. Provide sleeping arrangements at fire and EMS stations, senior centers, or municipal complex.
 - Ensure quiet time at these locations.
 - Plan for possible power interruptions at these locations.
- **Plan for Health and Welfare**
 - Consider needs for food and hydration.
 - Educate workers on appropriate winter and protective apparel.
 - Remind workers to pack personal items such as medications, special dietary needs, etc.
 - Remind supervisors and employees that employees on transitional duty may not work beyond their medical restrictions.

Storm Operations

- **Establish Priority Routes and Areas**
 - Clear parking lots and access routes of emergency response agencies (police, fire, and EMS) first.
 - Consider providing sand/salt to use until clearing occurs at municipal facilities.
- **Communication Plans/Telephone or Radio Contact**
 - Establish who will operate as Base (part of incident command structure).
 - Determine who takes calls from residents, both emergency and non-emergency (complaints).
 - Establish liaison with other towns or agencies, news agencies, etc.
 - Ensure operators remain in constant contact with Base.
 - Establish procedures for reporting and responding to accidents/incidents.
- **Deteriorating Storm Conditions “When to Temporarily Halt Operations”**
 - Who makes the final call?
 - Include the criteria for “temporary halting of operations” in the plan, i.e., discontinuing operations until conditions improve, with the consultation of major stakeholders.
 - Encourage all who are in the field to report the status of conditions for the safety of the entire crew.
- **Rest Breaks/Fatigue**
 - Inform drivers they have the personal responsibility to pull themselves from driving if they feel overly fatigued or diminished. Have a procedure on how the driver will report to a supervisor and how to address the situation within employment agreements.
- **Rotations**
 - Incorporate travel distance to work into shift planning. Those who live farthest, home after 12 hours to sleep and return for the next shift.

Post-Storm Operations

- **Return to Normal Operations**
 - As conditions normalize, transition back to normal 8-hour shifts.
 - Consider fatigue from the extended shifts when transitioning back to normal operations.
 - Inspect, repair, and perform routine maintenance on equipment.
- **Conduct After-Incident Debriefing**
 - Review with all stakeholders what worked and what challenges were encountered.
 - Update Snow Emergency Plan with lessons learned from the event.
- **Liability Issues – Recommendations to Limit Liability**
 - Maintain a record of weather conditions.
 - Document actions are taken, date, time, crews, equipment employed, and materials (salt, etc.) used.
 - Record all complaints with date and time received.
 - Document specific actions are taken and time of action in response to complaints.
 - Take photographs to record weather conditions and incidents.
 - Preserve newspaper articles on storm severity and clean-up activities.
 - Work with police to have their accident reports supplemented with photographs showing conditions.

Snow events are difficult. Proper planning and training can ease the strain on employees, managers, and the community. There are Shift Briefings lesson plans on several topics to assist available on the NJCE website: <https://njce.org/safety/shift-briefings/>