



Title: INCLEMENT WEATHER & DISTRICT CLOSURES POLICY
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Subject: EMERGENCY & SAFETY	Page: 1 of 7	Policy Number: 01.30.00
Category: DISTRICTWIDE POLICY	Approval Date: 01/22/2015	Last Revised Date: 06/13/2018

POLICY STATEMENT:

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County (*the "District"*) recognizes there will be instances when inclement weather causes concerns for employees' and the visiting public's safety. Occasionally, emergency conditions caused by extreme inclement weather may warrant District closure and/or the closing of some District properties.

In general, however, it shall be the policy of the District to make every effort to maintain normal working hours during periods of inclement weather in order to continue providing services to the citizens of Cook County. This policy provides guidance for those instances in which weather conditions or other declared emergencies warrant the closure of the District.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance regarding emergencies, inclement weather, and other related District closures.

AFFECTED AREAS:

This policy shall govern all District employees.

DEFINITIONS:

Emergency: A situation or an event that may pose an immediate risk to health, life, property or environment and possibly disrupt or interfere with District operations and activities.

Essential Services or Personnel: The District will create and maintain a list of services and employees who are considered essential to running critical functions within their operations in the event of a declared emergency or inclement weather closing (*e.g. the emergency management and safety committee, snow removal, emergency safety response services, and communication operators, etc...*). This list is to be updated on an annual basis, or as otherwise necessary, and employees should be notified they are on the list. When a new person is hired, he/she should be informed if they are filling a designated 'essential' position.

Guest: Guests include District visitors, permit holders, any non- District employees, volunteers, event participants, campground users, etc...

PROCEDURE/PROCESS:

1) **General Policy:**

- a. Emergency conditions caused by extreme inclement weather may warrant District closure and/or the closing of some District properties.

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- b. When such emergency conditions are thought to exist, the President or General Superintendent and/or his/her designees may seek input from public safety officials throughout the County which may have necessary information, to determine whether District closure is appropriate.
- c. District closures due to extreme inclement weather may include all District property, public buildings, programs delivered on District property, and administrative offices. For purposes of this policy, Law Enforcement properties, and other emergency service locations/facilities, are not considered “public”.
- d. The District may also declare emergencies, make other weather related announcements, and notify employees, and the public, if preserves, picnic groves, facilities, services, programs, events, campgrounds, sledding hills, and offices are closed and or cancelled.
- e. During a District closure due to extreme inclement weather only essential services and essential personnel are maintained.
- f. The decision to close the District due to extreme inclement weather shall be made either by the President, General Superintendent, and/or his/her designees.
- g. Notice will be given to the local media for broadcast to the general public, forwarded to all relevant officials, and communicated by other electronic media as appropriate.

2) **Criteria for Cancellations or Closures:**

- a. **General Policy:** Because the District covers over 69,000 acres, it is extremely difficult to arrive at a decision that is appropriate for each District property. Weather conditions rarely are uniform throughout this large area. There is no one decision that will satisfy everyone; however, a diligent effort is made to arrive at a reasonable decision that considers the safety of District employees, guests, permit holders, and volunteers.
- b. The District may close for one, or more, of the following factors: Snow Accumulation; Road Conditions; Ability to Access Buildings; Weather Conditions (*limited visibility, high winds, freezing rain/fog*); Temperature; Visibility; Wind-Chill; Weather Forecast; Fire; Flooding; Tornadoes; and, Lightning/Thunder Storms.

3) **Guest Compliance:**

- a. **Guest Responsibility:** When the District is closed **(1)** District guests are expected to stay off, and/or **(2)** immediately leave, District property.
- b. **Expected Inclement Weather:** Guests are encouraged to monitor the District website and local media stations before traveling to the District for information regarding possible District closures and/or delays.
- c. **Violations of this Policy:** Guests may be requested to leave District property by District staff before, during, and/or after inclement weather and/or a District closure. Guests who refuse to leave District property upon request may be subject to a fine and/or other legal consequences.

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4) Essential Services:

- a. Notwithstanding an announced District closing or delayed opening, certain essential service departments or essential employees within departments, due to the critical nature of the services they provide, will need to remain open. Such essential service departments or essential employees are designated by the General Superintendent, Department Heads, and/or their respective designees. Generally, such employees may include representatives in the Law Enforcement Department, Facilities & Fleet Maintenance Department, Resource Management Department, Communications Office, Information Technology Office, and the Landscape Maintenance Department.
- b. Employees should direct any questions about attendance and performance expectations during a delay or closure to his or her supervisor. All employees required by their supervisors to work during a delay or closure will be paid for all hours worked, or in accordance with any current collective bargaining agreement. The Human Resource Department may determine the appropriate coding of employee timesheets.
- c. Department Heads/Supervisors of critical departments or employees rendering essential services should clearly communicate to the affected employees their work attendance requirements during severe weather or other unusual conditions, regardless of media announcements of District closings or delays.
- d. Department Heads/Supervisors of critical departments or employees should prepare contingency plans, keep plans updated, and communicate such plans to employees.

5) Delays and Closures:

- a. For the purposes of this policy, a delay means that: **(a)** The District will issue a public announcement of the delay through media outlets, and update its website and social media accounts; and, **(b)** Employees who do not work in positions designated as essential will not be expected to report to work until the time specified in the delay announcement.
- b. For the purposes of this policy, a closure means that: **(a)** The District will issue a public announcement of the closure through media outlets, and update its website and social media accounts; **(b)** The District will not be opened for the day or will be closed before the end of the regular workday; and, **(c)** Employees will be expected to return to their normal shift or work schedule the following day, unless otherwise specified by announcements as detailed above.
- c. The District should make every reasonable effort to inform its employees and the general public for all District approved delays and/or closures. This may also include sending text and email messages, and automatic voice messages, to employees.
- d. Before or during inclement weather employees are encouraged to monitor TV media and/or the District website for possible District closure and/or delay announcements. Also, employees are also requested to monitor their work emails, text messages, and/or voice messages, before or during inclement weather for possible District closure or delay announcements. Employee may also monitor the National Weather Service, NOAA, or weather radios for inclement weather conditions and warnings.

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6) **Work Schedules:**

- a. During periods in which the District is still open and there is inclement weather and/or other unusual conditions, both employees and supervisors should keep two major goals in mind: **(a)** The safety and well-being of employees and visiting public; and, **(b)** The need for the District to conduct business on a regular basis.
- b. Occasionally weather conditions worsen during the day, making travel during rush hour especially hazardous. District management may decide to adjust office closing times accordingly, allowing office personnel and other employees to leave early.
- c. During periods of inclement weather and unless a delay or closing has been announced, employees are expected to be at work as scheduled, but, as is true generally, employees should take reasonable and safe measures in meeting their employment obligations and their own personal safety and well-being.

7) **Absences/ Time-Off/ Compensation:**

- a. In the event of inclement weather or any emergency which requires the absence of employees, the President or the General Superintendent, and/or his/her designee, may declare leave with pay. Official start and end times for the closures will be determined by the President, General Superintendent, and/or his/her designee.
- b. Conditions caused by ordinary inclement weather **require each employee** to make a personal decision regarding safety in traveling to and from the workplace. As with any unexpected absence, employees who do not feel it is safe to travel should contact their supervisor using approved methods.
- c. **Employee Requests:** Employee requests to be absent from work, arrive late, or be dismissed early, should be forwarded to the employee’s supervisor.
- d. During **(1)** times of inclement weather, **(2)** the District has not closed, and **(3)** the employee is unable to report to work at the expected time, the employee must: **(a)** Notify his/her supervisor; **(b)** Explain to the supervisor the reason for the absence; and, **(c)** Provide an estimated time of arrival at work (e.g. *later in the day, next day, etc.*).

Employees who do not report to work during periods of inclement weather, but call in and follow the proper procedures, and the District still being in operation (i.e. not closed) shall use accrued leave benefits for their absence. If the employee has no accrued leave benefits available, then the time absent is charged as “*Absent without Pay*”.

- e. Authorized work time lost during an inclement weather/emergency closure or delay will be considered regular work time or “Absent with Pay” for pay purposes and will not require time be charged to an employee’s time-off benefits, nor will there be a requirement that the time be made up.
- f. Employees determined to be essential personnel and/or who are required to work when District property has been otherwise closed shall be granted compensatory time for hours actually worked during the period of closing up to their regularly scheduled hours for the workday, and/or in accordance with collective bargaining agreements. Hours worked in excess of regularly scheduled hours are compensated as overtime based on each employee’s status under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

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- g. Part-time employees, seasonal employees, and District interns are paid for hours worked and are not eligible for discretionary leave with pay or compensatory time. Employees on previously approved leave during the affected period must continue to charge the appropriate leave and will not be eligible for discretionary leave under this policy.

RESPONSIBILITY:

- 1) **Office of the General Superintendent:** The Office of the General Superintendent shall be responsible for: (1) declaring District emergencies and/or closures; (2) communicating and updating District employees via the District website, social media accounts, and/or other media outlets, about District related closures; (3) sending employee “*robo-calls*” to their emergency contact numbers or emails, about District related closures; (4) working with the President’s Office, and other partner organizations, to ensure that the District maintain a safe and secure operation; and, (5) developing policies and procedures to ensure departmental compliance with this policy.
- 2) **Law Enforcement Department:** The Law Enforcement Department shall be responsible for: (1) responding to all emergency events occurring on District properties, to assist with the delivery of emergency services, conduct investigations, and make timely notifications to senior police management and other appropriate District managers and Communications Department; and, (2) serving as the official District liaison with the Cook County Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (“*DHSEM*”) on emergency, inclement weather, and District closure related projects, initiatives, and other related activities.
- 3) **Facilities & Fleet Maintenance Department:** The Facilities & Fleet Maintenance Department shall be responsible for: (1) collaborating with the Law Enforcement Department and DHSEM to promote county-wide, joint emergency management preparedness and response to emergencies and related inclement weather issues; (2) serving as a liaison to other municipal governments, as appropriate, for inclement weather related requests and issues; and, (3) providing support to District departments in District closure related activities.
- 4) **Landscape Maintenance:** The Landscape Maintenance Department shall be responsible for: (1) closing District properties as appropriate, or necessary, and/or as directed/approved by the General Superintendent and/or his/her designee, to ensure a safe and secure District workplace; (2) determining which District property should remain open and/or be closed; (3) informing the Communications Department of any District property closures and/or that will not be opened; (4) collaborating with the Law Enforcement Department and DHSEM to promote county-wide, joint emergency management preparedness and response to large scale disasters; and, (5) and to inform the Communications Department of site/facility/property specific closures.
- 5) **Resource Management Department:** The Resource Management Department shall be responsible for: (1) collaborating with the Law Enforcement Department and DHSEM to promote county-wide, joint emergency management preparedness and response to large scale disasters; and, (2) supporting the response to all emergency events occurring on District properties.
- 6) **Conservation & Experiential Programming Department:** The Conservation & Experiential Programming Department shall be responsible for: (1) determining when inclement weather would impact program/event delivery; (2) notifying the Communications Department when any program/event should be delayed and/or canceled; and, (3) notifying relevant District departments when needing additional support in the delay and/or cancelation of a program/event.

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- 7) **Human Resources Department:** shall be responsible for: (1) providing training to relevant District employees on this policy; (2) soliciting employee new and/or updated emergency contact information on an annual basis; and (3) determining how department related employee timesheets are to be coded, if required.
- 8) **Essential Personnel:** Employees whose job responsibilities require that they work during hazardous, emergency weather conditions, or state of public emergency in order to maintain critical institutional functions (*e.g. public safety employees, information technology or employees with critical safety responsibilities*) may be designated as “essential personnel”. Essential personnel shall be responsible for maintaining a normal, or altered, work schedule unless specifically excused by their Department Head and/or designee.
- 9) **Department Heads/Supervisors:** Department Heads and supervisors shall be responsible for: (1) assisting in implementing and maintaining safe workplace practices; (2) assisting in the implementation of this policy; (3) communicating this policy to the employees under their direction; (4) informing employees under their purview of District closures; (5) communicating with District leaders when appropriate and or necessary to ensure District safety and a secure workplace; and (6) maintaining current employee contact information (*e.g. phone numbers and/or emails*) to use only in the event of an emergency and/or facility closure.
- 10) **President of the Board of Commissioners:** The President of the Board of Commissioners retains the authority to close the District for emergency and other inclement weather purposes.
- 11) **District Employees:** District employees shall be responsible for: (1) adhering to this policy; (2) complying with District leadership requests; and (3) participating in District emergency safety related trainings upon request. (*Please refer to Section 09.50.06.03 (D) of this policy for more information.*)

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) All Department Heads and senior staff shall be trained on this policy.
- 2) All District supervisors shall be trained on this policy.
- 3) All District employees that have been deemed “*essential personnel*” and that may be called upon during times of emergencies or inclement weather should be trained on this policy.
- 4) All District employees assigned a radio/NOAA weather radio, should receive basic training on how to use such equipment.

COMMUNICATION PLAN:

- 1) This policy should be distributed to all District employees.
- 2) This policy should be added to the District shared drive, intranet, and website.
- 3) Department Heads should work to ensure that all of the staff under their purview are knowledgeable about this policy.

REFERENCES:

Forest Preserve District of Cook County
Employee Handbook, Work Hours

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Forest Preserve District of Cook County
Employee Handbook, Notice of Absence

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APPROVAL: Arnold Randall
General Superintendent

POLICY HISTORY:

Approved: 01/22/2015
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If you have questions, comments, or suggestions concerning District policies, please contact:

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