

NIU Environmental Health and Safety

Severe Winter Weather Closure Procedures

PURPOSE: The purpose of this procedure is two-fold: 1) to assist University Leadership in initiating the appropriate and timely response actions to a severe winter weather event and 2) to supplement the *Severe Weather and University Closure Procedure* dated 24 November 2014 as issued by the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost.

Winter weather can significantly impact and affect University operations. Recommended procedures will vary with the specific types of weather being experienced, and the forecast confidence of the event. This procedure will give University Administration the ability to weigh the risk versus benefit when making decisions regarding operations that expose students, staff and faculty to adverse and/or dangerous winter weather conditions. The University must be prepared to proactively alter, suspend, or terminate some or nearly all operations when winter weather conditions deteriorate and pose an unreasonable risk to personal safety and/or property.

The National Weather Service issues various kinds of winter weather watches and warnings in advance of, and during the winter storm when confidence levels reach an acceptably high threshold. These are defined and summarized below:

<http://weather.cod.edu/notes/criteria/>

These weather bulletins are displayed prominently on <http://weather.admin.niu.edu>, or <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/lot>.

PROCEDURES: In the event of an approaching winter storm, the following procedures will be initiated by the Staff Meteorologist:

Seven-to-Three-Day Time Frame Pre-Winter Storm Event

After determining with significant confidence that a winter storm producing precipitation that would affect campus operations (hereafter defined as one (1) inch of snow or more, or any amount of freezing drizzle, freezing rain, or ¼" of sleet or more), the staff meteorologist will notify the operational team via email, initially and then as conditions or confidence changes significantly during this time frame. Operational team members include:

- Associate Vice President, Facilities Management and Campus Services (designated representative of university leadership team)
- Emergency Management Specialist, NIU Department of Public Safety
- Assistant Superintendent, NIU Grounds Department
- Director and Associate Director, Environmental Health and Safety
- Director, Physical Plant

- Chief Heating Plant Engineer, Heating Plant
- Manager, Veolia Transportation
- Supervisor, Building Services
- Director, Media and Public Relations
- Director, Outreach Operations

This email briefing will consist of a forecast containing general information as to the scope of the event, such as significant snow, ice, or rain expected, and a general, broad-timeline of events.

Three-Day-to-12 Hour Time Frame Pre-Winter Storm Event: The staff meteorologist will distribute an e-mail to the operational team providing real time forecast data outlining anticipated winter storm conditions. The email will include:

1. Estimated initial day and approximate time and types of impacts;
2. Potential cause of the impacts (e.g. heavy or extreme amounts of snow, sleet, ice/freezing rain, freezing drizzle, high winds);
3. Estimated duration of the impacts;
4. Precipitation type(s), amount(s), and wind speed.

Telephone consultation is also available, including conference calls supplementing or in lieu of a written briefing for detailed information, as well as time for questions and answers.

During this time frame, in most cases, it will become more obvious if the situation bears watching for a potential closure. **Using the Severe Winter Weather Closure Model:** To assist the University Leadership in better understanding of the potential impacts of incoming winter storms, NIU Weather developed a model to show how various inclement weather types will affect the University. From approximately 48 hours in advance of the storm up through the onset of precipitation, the leadership team may enter values provided by the Staff Meteorologist with the objective of defining a threshold value to quantify the risk and seriousness of weather conditions. If the final total equals or exceeds a value of **50**, the AVP of Facilities Management and Campus Services will mobilize the University Leadership team to begin the discussion on whether the University needs to curtail or suspend operations.

If the number is equal to or exceeds a value of 100, it is extremely likely that the Operational team will recommend to the University Leadership that all activities within except for essential personnel, be suspended for the duration of the storm, or longer if deemed necessary. **Please note: this model should serve as a GUIDE and should not be solely used to dictate the closure process. A low value does NOT guarantee a low-impact event to the university, and a high value between 50 and 100 does not always mean closure.**

12-Hour Time Frame Pre-Winter Storm Event (Before Start of Morning or Evening Classes): The AVP of Facilities Management and Campus Services will initiate a conference call

with the University Leadership team. The staff meteorologist, as well as others member of the Operations team, may be requested to participate in the conference call to brief participants of updated closure model values based upon real time forecast data as well as to provide data regarding travel to, from and around the University, and potential for road closures and power outages. If the staff meteorologist is unavailable for any reason, then the National Weather Service county-averaged forecast and warnings can be used, with caution, to describe the impacts. The impacts will be described most clearly in their winter weather warnings, and can be seen at <http://weather.admin.niu.edu>, or <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/lot> , and via NOAA Weather Radio.

University Leadership has the following options to consider for weather related concerns.

1. Full campus operations including class schedules (unless cancelled by individual faculty members) remain in effect.
2. Classes are cancelled at one or more NIU campus locations with campus offices and physical facilities remaining operational. **Employees should exercise judgment in terms of travel conditions. Designated essential service personnel are required to report for duty.**
3. An emergency closure of one or more campus locations is authorized due to a severe weather emergency. Classes are cancelled, and all offices and physical facilities are closed with the exception of essential service operations. **Employees are placed on excused absence with the exception of designated essential service personnel who are required to report for duty** (weather conditions and the status of operations at the off-campus centers may differ from the DeKalb campus).

Among the options outlined above, condition #1 will apply in most circumstances. **As a general rule, the university is always open.**

When conditions #1 or #2 prevail, individual employees need to decide whether travel to the campus will be hazardous. With the exception of certain designated essential service personnel, *it is the personal responsibility of all faculty, staff, and students to make their own decisions and judgments concerning travel conditions and the danger of attending classes or coming to work under conditions which they personally believe to be unsafe.*

The decision to close the University in anticipation of a winter storm event can be completed 12 hours before a major event, given the availability of real time forecast data. **Therefore, when possible, a decision to close the University should be made 12 hours (or more) before the start of morning classes (defined as 8 AM, Monday-Saturday), and 9 hours before evening classes (defined as 6 PM, Monday-Friday) with a high-confidence forecast. Ideally, this should be done by 6 PM the previous day of the event. If the storm system is still very unpredictable and erratic, the decision to close should be made no later than 4 hours before**

the start of any classes to ensure that no employees attempt to commute before a decision is made.

After the decision is made, conditions should then be monitored to ensure that there are no major changes to the weather or impacts to the University, until the storm system has passed. Should there be major changes, the Staff Meteorologist will inform the operational team of such changes, and a re-evaluation of the decision(s) made should occur by email or telephone conference call.

If it appears the storm does not warrant closing the university: The staff meteorologist will advise the operations team as needed. Low-end, low-impact “nuisance” events like three (3) inches of snow with little wind will require additional caution by faculty, staff and students but it is not normally worthy of significantly altering campus operations.

If it appears the storm system could or will close the University: The operational team and University Leadership teams will initiate appropriate closure procedures within their respective areas of responsibility.

University Leadership or members of the Operations team can also request this procedure be used to separately evaluate any satellite NIU campus locations’ severe weather concerns when there is potential for those campus to experience weather different from the main DeKalb campus.