Adverse Weather & Emergency Closings

Summary Guide

Division of Human Resources
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Overview

The purpose of the Adverse Weather & Emergency Closings Summary Guide is to provide support to the DEQ’s (Department of Environmental Quality’s) employees in the event of inclement weather or emergency facility closures. **Please note:** there may be instances in which the appropriate authority (e.g. the Office of the Governor or Office of State Human Resources) renders an exception to the existing policies related to adverse weather or emergency closings, based on the circumstances.
Executive Summary

The DEQ’s mission is “providing science-based environmental stewardship for the health and prosperity of all North Carolinians.” The goal of the Adverse Weather & Emergency Closings Summary Guide is to assist the agency in maintaining its’ safety during inclement weather. Additionally, the goal is to continue to effectively provide services to our citizens in the event of an emergency closure. Further, the goal is to provide clarity regarding the adverse weather and emergency closings’ process.

Criteria for Adverse Weather & Facility Closures

The Secretary of the DEQ (or his/her designee) will determine when a facility can close or suspend non-mandatory services. The following will apply when a state facility is closed, or operations are reduced due to emergency conditions:

- Employees who are not required to work at an alternate site or as an emergency employee shall not be required to charge leave or make up the time; the employee shall charge the work time as “Other Management Approved Leave (9540).”
- Generally, emergency employees required to work during the emergency shall be granted paid time off for all hours worked as allowed by policy. This time must be used within 12 months of its being awarded. Management shall make every effort to give employees the opportunity to take this time off. The work time earned should be used after compensatory time off but must be used before vacation or sick leave.
- Please note: In instances which the Governor declares a State of Emergency or Disaster, the agency is authorized to pay overtime when the following conditions occur: 1) Employees are performing law enforcement or response/recovery activities during the emergency/disaster; 2) There is a requirement by management for employees to work overtime during the emergency/disaster; and 3) Funds are available, (based on approval from the Office of State Budget and Management).
- If additional employees, (not in mandatory/essential operations), are needed for situations such as cleanup, support and recovery during the time the agencies remain closed, the agency head may elect to compensate them in the same manner as emergency employees.

Generally, employees may refer to their regional office and division’s COOP (Continuity of Operations Plan), supervisor and/or division’s leadership when determining the proper method of business operations, in the event of adverse weather or emergency closings.

Recording & Accounting for Work Time

Employees who are able to remotely work are encouraged to do so (with their supervisor’s approval). Employees unable to perform work remotely or report to work due to inclement weather or safety concerns may charge the work time as approved leave (Compensatory, Vacation, or Bonus Leave) or Adverse Weather Leave.
Access to Electronic Work Files

Employees who have VPN (virtual private network) access may log in to the network remotely (if the network is operable). If your primary work location has a server on-site and a power outage occurs, the work files will be inaccessible. Therefore, DEQ’s Information and Technology Services (ITS) recommend moving critical, non-sensitive work files to SharePoint or OneDrive during the inclement weather. OneDrive and SharePoint are cloud solutions requiring an internet connection to access your files. Additionally, the reference document titled Access to Electronic Work Files is a helpful guide in accessing your work files remotely via VPN or SharePoint. Should you have additional questions, please contact the DEQ’s ITS Help Desk at (919) 707-8900 or via email at denr.support@ncdenr.gov.

Determining A Position’s Designation

Categories/Designations for Critical Positions

The State has three separate designations for critical positions in the Integrated HR Payroll System (also referred to as BEACON) and the Office of State Human Resources’ Policy, which are defined as follows:

1. Emergency – Employees who are required to work during emergency conditions because their positions have been designated by their agency head or designee as necessary in response to a specific emergency situation in compliance with the agency’s emergency response plan. These designations are related only to the “Adverse Weather and Emergency Closing” policy in the State Human Resources Manual.

2. Mandatory/Essential – The terms mandatory and essential are used interchangeably in the Office of State Human Resources’ Manual. Essential positions include positions directly related to law enforcement and public safety, classroom instruction, and the custody or care of persons for whom the state has a constitutional duty to serve. According to the policy, administrative and support positions are not routinely deemed essential, however the DEQ Secretary or his/her designee may designate additional positions as an essential position depending upon the circumstances of each request.

3. Key – A position that requires specialized knowledge that is unique within the organization. The specialized knowledge is essential for the organization to meet the goals and objectives that are linked to its mission or statutory requirements. The loss of an employee in a key position would lead to immediate difficulties in getting the work accomplished.
Please note: a position can possess more than one or all the designations noted above (Emergency, Mandatory/Essential and Key). If the definition of the designations are not applicable, then the “None” field should be selected. Additionally, the designation may be applied, based on the nature of the event. For example, in a scenario in which the position is required to address the matters related to the impact of a Hurricane (e.g., waste leakage, a dam breach); may differ, versus a requirement to address matters related to a chemical spill. The main questions to ask when determining the designation(s) (one or more) is: Would or could the position be required at any given time to act in an emergency response capacity? mandatory/essential capacity? key expert capacity? If the answer is yes then the appropriate designations should be applied. Please refer to the helpful Position Designation for Adverse Weather & Incidents Checklist to assist you in determining the appropriate designation. Additionally, designations may change, based on the incumbent in a position, e.g., based on skill sets.

Facility closures approved by the DEQ Secretary or his/her designee must be reported to the Office of State Human Resources within five business days, hence must be reported to the DEQ’s Division of Human Resources within two business days. Additionally, the closure report must state the number of emergency employees and the number of non-emergency employees. The number of emergency employees and non-emergency employees stated on the form should ideally correlate with the position’s designation noted in the BEACON (IHRPS) System, however may change if needed.

The divisions should accurately represent the number of emergency and non-emergency employees (at the physical primary work location) in which they have direct responsibility and control, e.g. their headquarters. The regional office locations should report the number of emergency and non-emergency employees at the physical location in which they have direct responsibility and control, e.g. based on the information noted in the BEACON (IHRPS) System, as determined by the employees’ assigned division.

Facility Closures and Accessibility to the Primary Work Location

Determining Closures & Employees Accessibility

Facility closures must be approved by the DEQ Secretary or his/her designee. The safety of an employee is paramount; thus, an employee may not return to the premise of a facility (the primary work location) until the premise (grounds and building) has been deemed safe to occupy or briefly enter by the facility’s owner, manager, an appointed DEQ contact and the DEQ’s Facility Services unit. Employees who return to the building prior to the safety clearance will be asked to leave the premise and may be subject to disciplinary action if they fail to comply.

There may be instances in which the building may not be deemed or verified as habitable or suitable due to facility issues, (e.g., inoperable heat or bathrooms), however the building structure and interior is safe for entry to obtain work equipment or materials and return to an alternate or remote work site. – This must be verified by the appropriate aforementioned authorities.
References & Resources

OSHR Adverse Weather Policy
OSHR Emergency Closing Policy
OSHR Hours of Work and Compensation Policy
OSHR Safety Policy
Access to Electronic Work Files Guide
Position Designation for Adverse Weather & Incidents Checklist