



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE – AP414-6

Severe Weather

Area: Operations
Policy Reference: Emergency Preparedness (PO414)
Approved: September 20, 1999
Revised: November 9, 2015; February 3, 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this administrative procedure is to provide an operational framework that promotes safe procedures to consider in response to instances of severe weather conditions. The health and safety of students, staff, volunteers and/or community users, remains a priority.

2. Definitions

Colour Coded Weather Alerts (*Environment and Climate Change Canada*) – the colours indicate the risk the weather is. Every type of weather alert, Warnings, Advisories, and Watches, has a colour when it is issued. The weather alert colours move from yellow, to orange, to red, as the potential risk increases.

Yellow Alert (*Environment and Climate Change Canada*) Hazardous weather may cause damage, disruption, or health impacts; impacts are moderate, localized and/or short-term; yellow alerts are the most common.

Orange Alert (*Environment and Climate Change Canada*) Severe weather is likely to cause significant damage, disruption, or health impacts; impacts are major, widespread and/or may last a few days; orange alerts are uncommon.

Red Alert (*Environment and Climate Change Canada*) Very dangerous and possibly life-threatening weather will cause extreme damage and disruption; impacts are extensive, widespread, and prolonged; red alerts are rare.

Weather Advisory (*Environment and Climate Change Canada*) act now to protect yourself from significant weather; issued for specific weather events that are less severe but still significant; issued for blowing snow, fog, freezing drizzle, and frost.

Weather Warning (*Environment and Climate Change Canada*) act now to protect yourself from severe weather; urgent messages that severe weather is either happening or will happen; usually issued 6 to 24 hours in advance, but can be longer; some severe weather (for example, tornadoes) can occur rapidly, with less than 30 minutes' notice.

Weather Watch (*Environment and Climate Change Canada*) get ready to protect yourself from potential severe weather; issued when conditions are favorable for the development of severe weather; may be upgraded to a Warning when certainty increases.

3. Procedures

3.1 The following authorities will be considered the primary source of official information for weather events including, but not limited to, advisories, warnings, watches, temperature related information, air quality health index:

- a) Government of Canada - Environment and Climate Change Canada
- b) Local Public Health Authority - Durham Region Public Health
- c) Local Conservation Authority - Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority
- d) Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
- e) Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority

3.2 Principals and Managers will develop an Emergency Preparedness Plan. When establishing the plan for severe weather, the following information and precautions are to be noted:

3.2.1 Cold Weather and Cold-Related Events

- a) Identify warm areas for work and rest breaks;
- b) Share signs and symptoms of cold stress and encourage ongoing observation of staff and students for these symptoms so appropriate action may be taken;
- c) Modify activities or schedule of activities that involve physical exertion and exposure to the weather for staff and students, where possible;
- d) When the temperature reaches -15 degrees Celsius or a windchill of -20 degrees Celsius, Principals should consider keeping students indoors or shortening the length of time they spend outdoors. This decision will depend on a variety of factors based on each unique school community;
- e) Students should remain indoors when the temperature or the wind chill factor reaches -28 degrees Celsius or colder as temperatures at this level could possibly lead to cold injuries such as frostbite and frostnip; and
- f) Encourage staff and students to wear warm clothing that is appropriate for the activity and weather conditions, including wearing multiple layers, covering exposed skin and appropriate footwear if conditions are also wet, icy or slippery.

3.2.2 Hot Weather and Heat-Related Events

- a) Remind staff and students to drink water and stay hydrated;
- b) Identify a cooling area in the building to allow individuals to cool down;
- c) Share signs and symptoms of heat stress and encourage ongoing observation of staff and students for these symptoms so appropriate action may be taken;
- d) Modify activities or schedule of activities that involve physical exertion and exposure to the weather for staff and students, where possible;
- e) Encourage staff and students to wear lightweight, loose fitting, light coloured and breathable clothing;
- f) Encourage staff and students to avoid direct exposure to sun, where possible, and to wear a hat, sunglasses and apply sunscreen;
- g) Open windows and doors as well as utilize portable fans to assist with air circulation where effective and applicable; and
- h) Use blinds or shades on windows to reduce direct sunlight.

3.2.3 Air Quality Health Index

- a) For an air quality health index higher than 7, strenuous outdoor activities for all students and staff who are at risk due to health conditions should be rescheduled or reduced. Consideration should be given to reducing or rescheduling strenuous outdoor activities for the general population;
- b) For an air quality health index above 10, avoid strenuous outdoor activities for staff and students. People with heart or breathing problems are at a greater risk and additional precautions may be required.

3.2.4 Severe Thunderstorms and Lightning

- a) When lightning is seen or thunder is heard, immediately suspend outdoor activities; staff and students should take shelter in a protected area;
- b) Remain indoors, away from doors and windows;
- c) Avoid using corded telephones, electrical equipment;
- d) Keep away from metal objects which may act as electrical conductors; and
- e) Be aware of the possibility of power failure.

3.2.5 Tornadoes

- a) All staff and students should remain indoors. Any individuals in portables should move to a safe location inside the school;
- b) Stay away from windows, doors and outside walls and out of large areas such as the gymnasium or cafeteria until the worst of the storm is over. The safest location will be a central hallway on the ground floor or interior rooms without windows;
- c) Students and staff should protect their heads and crouch or kneel against the wall. All students and staff (with the exception of the School Response Team) are to remain in their places until the “all clear” is announced; and

- d) If power is out, a megaphone may be used to provide an emergency warning to occupants of the building.

3.2.6 Hurricanes

- a) Due to the ability to predict the onset of a hurricane, the majority of activity associated with a hurricane will be coordinated prior to its onset. This may involve boarding up windows and doors and securing any loose items or small structures;
- b) The preparation of the school/building for the onset of a hurricane and any post hurricane activity will be coordinated by the Director of Education, or designate, in consultation with municipal and provincial authorities.

3.2.7. Floods

- a) Students and staff should remain a safe distance away from flood areas and rising bodies of water such as streams, rivers, culverts and reservoirs.
- b) Direction will be taken from local authorities.

3.2.8 After the Storm

- a) After any significant weather event:
 - i. The school/building and surrounding property should be checked for damage or hazards that may have been caused by the weather and reported as soon as reasonably possible.
 - ii. Avoid loose or dangling wires and report any downed electrical or phone lines.
 - iii. Report any sharp objects or materials and do not handle these items.
 - iv. Report any broken sewer or water mains.
 - v. Beware of any dangling tree limbs and report same.
 - vi. Stay away from swollen and rising bodies of water.

3.3 Responsibilities

3.3.1 The Principal/Manager or designate shall:

- a) Maintain an awareness of any developing weather.
- b) Monitor weather updates via internet, or emergency radio in the case of a complete power failure.

4. Sources

4.1 [Environment and Climate Change Canada](#)

5. Appendices

Nil

6. Related Policies and Administrative Procedures

6.1 [Emergency Preparedness Policy \(PO414\)](#)