

Buncombe County Government Inclement Weather Policy

Adopted December 5, 2017

This policy is specific to County employees and facilities. It does not replace any weather related policies that Department's may have with vendors or within service contracts.

Goals of Inclement Weather Procedures

Buncombe County provides a wide range of services. Many services can be accessed over the phone or online. Emergency and mandated response services are available 24/7 through 911 or 211.

During inclement weather our goal is to ensure access to our services while recognizing the issues facing our employees who must travel to and from work. In addition, we also recognize that some of our employees are left with few options for childcare when schools and childcare centers close.

The goal of this policy is to outline the County plan for operating services during challenging weather conditions while:

- Serving our citizens and being fiscally responsible to the public
- Protecting our employees
- Limiting unnecessary travel in dangerous conditions so emergency personnel can utilize manpower and resources more efficiently
- Responsibly limiting the number of employees reporting to work in a weather emergency, so our General Services staff can focus time and resources to safely opening buildings and clearing parking lots and walkways where public and staff will be present.

Inclement Weather affecting Operations

Given we live in a mountainous community, often even the threat of inclement weather can close schools and businesses. In unique circumstances, extremely dangerous weather conditions may force the cancellation of all non-emergency services for part or all of a day. Closure decisions and procedures are managed in accordance with the Buncombe County Inclement Weather Policy and at the direction of the County Manager in consultation with the Emergency Management Director. These decisions can range from closing, a delayed opening or early closure. These decision can impact some or all of our buildings.

Buncombe County Government Inclement Weather Policy

Adopted December 5, 2017

If the Emergency Management Director and County Manager determine that Departments will be closed, employees who are available to work will be compensated for the time they were unable to work (this does not include compensating employees who were already scheduled to be off).

Inclement Weather and Services

Decisions to close, open late or close early will be communicated to staff via Nixel (our phone and text emergency communication system), personal cell phones, email, and public announcement sites. Announcements to close or delay opening will be made no later than 6:30 AM.

Decisions to close offices or Departments will be communicated to general services staff so that they can adjust their efforts to clear walkways and parking lots for those offices that are to remain open.

Note: Announcements will be specific to County Government Offices. This is different than announcements specific to the Courthouse, City or County schools.

It is the responsibility of each Department to have an operating schedule in place that allows for continuity of services, when needed and appropriate, during bad weather conditions. It is expected that Departments whose physical office must be open to the public have a plan for operating with a skeleton crew when weather conditions are bad. To protect the safety of those employees who work, Departments may allocate funds to enable employees to stay downtown if necessary or use public transportation to get to and from work.

When appropriate to serving the public, Departments are encouraged to find ways that their employees can work remotely using their phones and computers. Departmental inclement weather plans should ensure staff are prepared when inclement weather is predicted and take their laptops or other work materials home. It is understood that Department Directors have discretion in determining those positions and employees who can effectively work remotely and which work materials can be appropriately taken from County offices.

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Employee Leave Due to Inclement Weather

The County encourages employees to use their best judgment in assessing the risk of coming to work and returning home, based on individual circumstances. We recognize that conditions in Buncombe County can vary significantly throughout the County. **Those who believe the road conditions from home are dangerous are urged and even expected to stay home to prevent injury of themselves or others.**

If it is in the best interest of the employee not to work on a given day, the employee should follow the leave policy and contact their supervisor advising them as to their status for the day, prior to the beginning of the work day. Likewise, if an employee chooses to leave work due to weather, the employee must notify their supervisor.

Employees who are unable to report to work because of inclement weather may use accrued vacation leave, compensatory time, personal leave or leave without pay to cover the missed work time. Use of accrued sick leave is appropriate only in the case of illness. Supervisors are encouraged to work with employees to provide viable options for making up missed work time. Department Directors are encouraged to work cooperatively to support employees and find solutions that work for the employee and the Department.

We recognize that there are times when the County will remain open while public schools and local childcare centers close due to weather. Supervisors are encouraged to recognize the difficulties this creates for working parents by responding with as much flexibility as the particular work environment allows. Supervisors may permit caregivers to make an alternative arrangement or to take work home, if the specific job duties accommodate that arrangement. Department Directors must determine based on individual work sites if it is safe for children to accompany their caregivers to work for short periods of time. Consideration should be given to the privacy and confidentiality requirements of the work area, the potential disruption to other staff/public, and the physical safety of the environment.

Emergency Services

Regardless of the cancellation or closure decision, employees who perform emergency services are expected to ensure continued operations. Examples include those who work in EMS, law enforcement, and some social services such as Adult or Child Protective Services. Technology

Buncombe County Government Inclement Weather Policy

Adopted December 5, 2017

can support some of these services such as Adult and Child Protective Services through remote access and response at the discretion of the Department Director. Supervisors of employees who perform emergency service work are responsible for communicating attendance expectations in advance and discussing anticipated transportation difficulties and work with employees to design solutions to transportation issues.

Department Directors should limit work related travel to that which is essential to public safety and public good. This includes the use of 4X4 vehicles. When employees must drive for work related responses it is expected the Supervisor is aware the employee is in the field, has a plan for ensuring safety and that the employee checks in to ensure they safely complete the travel.

Director/Supervisor Preparation

Buncombe County supervisors need to prepare for inclement weather in the following ways:

- 1) Notify those employees (if any) who perform emergency duties of the expectation to report to work during inclement weather regardless of a County closure and discuss transportation options if that poses difficulties for the employees. **This expectation should be clear in job descriptions and made clear to applicants when applying for these positions.**
- 2) Each Department Director must determine to what extent public access will be needed when offices are closed and design a staffing plan that is responsive to the needs to the community and Department. This may range from forwarding phones, posting emergency response numbers or allowing citizens to leave a recorded message.
- 3) Ensure staff are notified:
 - Communicate to staff expectations regarding closing or opening specific to your Department or the agency as a whole. Supervisors are expected to maintain an up-to-date after hours phone contact list including all employees.
 - Ensure your staff know how to contact you.
 - Review the Inclement Weather Procedure with your staff.

Public Relations and Communication with the Public

Once a decision has been made to close, delay opening or close early the Employee/Community Relations Director will ensure the public is alerted using a variety of mediums such as radio, TV, social media, County webpage, 211, etc. All Departments must determine the appropriate level

Buncombe County Government Inclement Weather Policy

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of access the citizens they serve will need. This can range from posting an emergency response number, forwarding phones or simply having the capacity for citizens to leave a message to be responded to when the office reopens. This will vary by Department based on the type service they provide and the closing of related state or local government offices that will affect work.

Once a Department Director determines the correct plan, notice should be given to the public through recorded messages that could range from “The XXX office is closed today due to inclement weather, please leave a message and we will return your call as soon as the office reopens” to “The XX office is closed today due to inclement weather, if you have a need to speak with an employee immediately, please call the following number XXX-XXXX.” When possible, calls may be addressed through call forwarding, providing a seamless call response.