

12.5 Storms or Hazardous Conditions

Policy Statement

Government offices and worksites will normally remain open during storms or hazardous conditions. Employees are expected to make every effort to report for duty and remain at their work stations during their scheduled working hours. With the exception of those employees who provide designated services as defined in this policy, employees should assess their own ability to get to and from work safely and, where possible, consult with their immediate supervisor. Employees may make a personal decision to take time off.

In exceptional circumstances, a decision may be made to close some or all government offices or worksites, due to extreme storm or hazardous conditions. In only those situations will affected employees be granted leave with pay for their regularly scheduled work hours.

Definitions

DEPARTMENT

Department, office, or public service entity of the Government of Nova Scotia as defined in the *Public Service Act*.

DEPUTY HEAD

The deputy minister or designate of a department, or the senior administrative officer of an office not reporting through a deputy minister.

DESIGNATED SERVICES

Services determined by department deputy heads to be essential or unique in their nature. Employees who provide these services are required to report to or remain at work, at the direction of their immediate supervisor, even if the Deputy Minister to the Premier closes offices or worksites under this policy.

STORMS

Adverse weather conditions such as heavy snowfall, hurricane or blizzard conditions.

HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS

Conditions, often resulting from a storm, that may include power outages, advisories from the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal on the use of public highways, and/or advisories from police, Emergency Management Office or other agencies.

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Declared state of emergency or conditions deemed by the employer to be sufficiently dangerous or disruptive to require the closure of offices or discontinuance of normal business.

Policy Objectives

- To acknowledge the need for employees to make reasonable assessments of their ability to travel to and from work safely during storms or hazardous conditions, and to reaffirm their role in making individual decisions about such matters.
- To ensure a consistent understanding and application of leaves requested by employees for absences due to storms or hazardous conditions.
- To ensure a consistent understanding that government offices will only be closed under extreme circumstances.
- To establish a framework to facilitate the making of decisions to close regional offices due to extreme storm or hazardous conditions in one or more regions.

Application and Exceptions

This policy applies to all civil servants whose terms and conditions are set out in accordance with the *Civil Service Act* and regulations and other direct employees of the provincial government. The policy applies to all bargaining unit staff who are employed by the Government of Nova Scotia, unless it conflicts with the collective agreement, in which case the collective agreement shall apply.

Because of the unique nature of some government departments, facilities and services, this policy may not be applicable. These exceptions include the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, correctional centres, courts, some services provided by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and certain designated services, as determined by departmental deputy heads in consultation with the Public Service Commission, and/or as set out in relevant collective agreements.

Policy Directives

GOVERNMENT OFFICES AND WORKSITES REMAIN OPEN

- Government offices and worksites will normally remain open during storms or hazardous conditions. Employees are expected to make every effort to report for duty and to remain at their work stations during their scheduled working hours.
- With the exception of those employees who provide designated services as defined in this policy, employees should assess their own ability to get to and from work safely and, where possible, consult their immediate supervisor.
- Employees may make a personal decision to take time off. In such circumstances, time lost by an employee as a result of absence due to storm or hazardous conditions may:
 - i) be made up by the employee at a time agreed upon between the employee and the employee's immediate supervisor, or
 - ii) be charged to the employee's accumulated vacation, unused holiday time, or accumulated overtime where such an entitlement exists, or
 - iii) be taken as leave without pay.
- Provisions (i), (ii), and (iii) shall also apply in situations where an office or worksite has not been closed in accordance with this policy, but remains physically unopened because of a decision by staff at that worksite to take time off. In these situations, where there has been no decision made to close the office or worksite, employees will be required to make up or charge time lost to accumulated leave, according to the provisions noted above. Employees who arrive at the worksite and are unable to gain access are directed to contact their immediate supervisor for instructions. Having attempted to report for work, these employees may be granted paid leave. It is expected departments will develop guidelines with the Treasury and Policy Board to further address these types of situations, as appropriate.
- Where advance preparation for the possibility of closure includes consideration of the option of working from home, and where this option has been pre-approved by the immediate supervisor, such time shall serve as worked time.
- Reasonable lateness beyond the beginning of an employee's regular shift starting time, as determined by the immediate supervisor, shall not be subject to provisions (i), (ii), and (iii) above where the employee is able to establish to the satisfaction of the immediate supervisor that every reasonable effort has been made by the employee to arrive at their work site at the scheduled time.

- The employer (as represented by the immediate supervisor or manager) may, in the event of storm conditions or because of the condition of public streets and highways, and in circumstances where it can be accommodated within operational requirements, determine it appropriate to allow employees to leave work prior to the end of their regular shift. Employees will not be required to make up this time.

CLOSURE OF GOVERNMENT OFFICES OR WORKSITES

- In exceptional circumstances, a decision may be made to close some or all government offices or worksites, due to extreme storm or hazardous conditions. In only those situations will affected employees be granted leave with pay for their regularly scheduled work hours.
- In recognition that weather and other conditions will differ from one region of the province to another, it may be appropriate for government offices or worksites in one or more regions to close while others remain open.
- When a decision to close offices or worksites in one or more regions or province-wide may be required, a small committee of regionally based senior employees, appointed in consultation with deputy heads, will consult and advise the Deputy Minister to the Premier, who shall make the closure decision. Should the Deputy Minister to the Premier not be available to the Committee, the Committee may make the decision, in consultation with the Communications Advisor to the Deputy Minister to the Premier. The Communications Advisor shall advise the Deputy Minister of the Treasury and Policy Board of a closure recommendation and, in consultation with Communications Nova Scotia, disseminate the decision.
- All closure decisions shall be communicated in accordance with guidelines developed under this policy, in as timely a fashion as circumstances permit.
- Until and unless employees have been informed of a closure through the government website, through email or other notice from the Deputy Minister to the Premier, by their immediate supervisor or through the media, they are advised to assume business as usual and to act in accordance with this policy.

Policy Guidelines

When deciding to close government offices or worksites, the following will be considered:

- local weather forecasts and conditions
- Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal road reports
- the presence or threat of other safety hazards
- special measures authorized by the Emergency Management Office (e.g., state of emergency)

- other available information and agency advisories
- Departments may issue guidelines, to assist in the implementation and administration of this policy and to facilitate consistency at regional levels. These guidelines should be developed in consultation with Treasury and Policy Board and must in all cases be consistent with and reflective of this policy. Only this policy shall apply where such guidelines are found to be in conflict.

Accountability

EMPLOYEES

Employees are responsible for acting in accordance with this policy.

IMMEDIATE SUPERVISORS/MANAGERS

Immediate supervisors/managers are responsible for ensuring that employees are informed of this policy and for ensuring its fair and consistent application in their respective worksites.

DEPUTY HEADS

Deputy heads are responsible for the timely designation of services for which employees who provide them are required to report to or remain at work in the event of government office or worksite closures under this policy.

Deputy heads are also responsible for the fair and consistent application of this policy within their departments, as well as the delegation of responsibility for communication of closure decisions, as required.

DEPUTY MINISTER TO THE PREMIER

Except as otherwise provided for in this policy, the Deputy Minister to the Premier is responsible for making the decision to close government offices in the event of extreme storm or hazardous conditions. The Communications Advisor to the Deputy Minister to the Premier is responsible for initiating the broad communication of closure decisions, in accordance with guidelines developed under this policy.

The Deputy Minister to the Premier, along with other deputy heads, is also responsible for the fair and consistent application of the policy across all government departments and for consultation with the Treasury and Policy Board with respect to the impact of this policy on, and its application to, government employees.

Monitoring

Treasury and Policy Board is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness and the consistent application of this policy, and may periodically conduct audits of departmental practices.

References

Civil Service Act
Civil Service Regulations
Master Civil Service Collective Agreement
Public Service Act

Enquiries

Communications Advisor to the Deputy Minister to the Premier
Treasury and Policy Board
(902) 424-3920

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Approved by: Deputy Minister, Treasury and Policy Board *Most recent review: April 4, 2008*

Guidelines for Regional Committees and Communication of Closure Decisions

Committee Structure and Function

Three regional committees have been established to help facilitate a decision to close provincial government offices in one or more regions outside the Halifax Regional Municipality.

- Cape Breton (Richmond, Inverness and Victoria Counties)
- North/Eastern (Cumberland, Colchester, Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough Counties)
- South/Western (Kings, Annapolis, Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne, Queens and Lunenburg Counties)

Each committee will be made up of three senior regional employees appointed by the Deputy Minister to the Premier.

The chair of each regional committee will be appointed from among and by committee members and may alternate from year to year. The chair will be responsible for ensuring the agreement on protocol for consultation and decision-making among members when required.

In preparation for extreme weather or hazardous conditions, the chair of each regional committee will make telephone contact with committee members. Each committee member will consult local conditions, forecasts and other advisories.

Morning Office Closures

If extreme weather or hazardous conditions occur over night, committee members will come to an agreement on the recommended action with respect to office closures for their region or for local areas/communities by 5:15 AM.

By 5:30 AM, the committee chair will notify the Deputy Minister to the Premier with the recommended action. Where the Deputy Minister to the Premier is unavailable, the committee will make a localized closure decision with the Communications Advisor to the Deputy Minister to the Premier. The Communications Advisor will advise the Deputy Minister of the Treasury and Policy Board of the closure recommendation.

Closure Reassessment

If hazardous conditions persist or diminish during the day, the regional committees will re-evaluate local conditions by 11:00 AM and report recommendations to their respective committee chair.

By 11:30 AM, committee chairs will report a recommendation to close or re-open offices to the Deputy Minister to the Premier. If offices are to re-open, employees would be expected to report to work at 1:00 PM.

Communication

Upon deciding to close offices, across the province, in one or more regions, or in a local area or community within a region, the Deputy Minister to the Premier will contact the Communications Advisor before 6:00 AM for morning closures, and before 12 noon for afternoon closures or re-openings to:

- contact Communication Nova Scotia to have a news release issued and posted on the government website;
- contact Treasury and Policy Board's webmaster to post and/or update the Government Office Closure icon on the government homepage;
- record a message on the government closure information line 1-877-424-6045; and
- notify Departmental Communication Directors and Deputy Heads.

Note: Once notified of a closure, Deputy Heads will activate their respective internal communication plans. (See Direct Communication to Staff below)

Direct Communication to Staff

It is expected that within their respective Business Continuity Plans, Departments will include a plan for communication with departmental staff in the event of a closure of offices, and processes for the designation of services as required.