

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 head of Treasury and Policy Board 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 Public Works on the use of public highways, and/or advisories from police, Emergency Measures Organization 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 Public Works 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. Departments may develop guidelines 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 there is a decision made to close all offices or worksites across the province or all those in the Halifax Regional Municipality, the Deputy Head of Treasury and Policy Board, in consultation with the Public Service Commissioner, will make this decision. The Deputy Minister, Treasury and Policy Board or a designate will advise other deputy heads of all such decisions.
- When a decision to close some or all offices or worksites within regions outside the Halifax Regional Municipality may be required, a small committee of regionally based senior employees, appointed in consultation with deputy heads, will consult and advise the Deputy Head of Treasury and Policy Board, who shall make the closure decision. Should the Deputy Minister, Treasury and Policy Board not be available to the Committee, the Committee may make and communicate 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 Head, Treasury and Policy Board, 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 Public Works road reports

- the presence or threat of other safety hazards
- special measures authorized by the Emergency Measures Organization (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.

TREASURY AND POLICY BOARD

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

The Deputy Head of Treasury and Policy Board, 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 Public Service Commissioner 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

Treasury and Policy Board
424-8910

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