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Nottinghamshire School Severe Weather Guidance

**March 2016
Updated September 2021**

HR Advice, Support and Training Service

Guidance Note for Schools

1. Severe Weather School Closure

1.1 Attached as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 are extracts from the NCC's agreed policy on Severe Weather Conditions – Guidelines for managers and Guidance for head teachers and nominated property officers. Both these documents provide detailed advice and guidance for managing school closures due to severe weather conditions, and should be read in conjunction with this summary.

2. Specific Information on school based staff attendance

2.1 Please find below additional guidance on queries you may receive from staff in your school regarding attendance during severe weather conditions and other emergency closures.

2.2 The decision to close a school will normally rest with the head teacher, on the basis of weather forecasts and on-the-spot observations following an appropriate assessment of the risks. When radio stations advise people to avoid non-essential travel, it is directed at travel that could quite easily be deferred or cancelled altogether. It does not mean that travel to school or work is unnecessary.

3. School open to pupils

3.1 Although it is recognised that severe weather conditions make it difficult for staff to get to and from work, all staff are expected to come in to school unless they have permission to be away from work for other reasons. Transport problems, which may be caused by snow or other factors, do not alter their obligation. This obligation applies equally to all staff and is not affected by where they live. Staff who live a considerable distance from their workplace or in isolated locations are also expected to attend work as usual, if at all possible. However, when adverse weather conditions make travelling difficult or dangerous, staff should make their own assessment of the risks of travelling and inform the head teacher. The head teacher may then authorise staff not to attend school, in these circumstances.

4. School closed to pupils

4.1 When a school is closed to pupils, staff are still expected to go to their place of work unless told otherwise by the head teacher. Contract, cleaning and any other services due to visit the school also need to be advised of any emergency requirements.

4.2 As a guideline, employees should be paid for absences due to severe weather conditions if:-

- The head teacher is satisfied that every attempt has been made by an employee to attend work
- The school/place of work is closed due to loss of power/water supplies, severe weather or damage caused by the weather

- Normal care arrangements break down at short notice e.g. their own child's school is closed and other suitable care arrangements cannot be put in place at short notice.

Should you require advice or guidance on employment related matters within this guidance please contact the HR duty desk on 0115 9774433.

Enclosures:

Appendix 1 – Severe Weather conditions: Guidelines for managers

(This appendix is extract from the Appendix 3 of the NCC's agreed policy on Severe Weather conditions)

Appendix 2 – Guidance for head teachers and nominated property officers

(This appendix is extract from the Appendix 6 of the NCC's agreed policy on Severe Weather conditions)

Appendix 3 – Plan for managing access routes during periods of snow and ice

Appendix 1: Severe Weather conditions – Guidelines for managers

1. Introduction

- 1.1** In the event of a period of severe weather conditions, e.g. snow, fog, floods etc. Corporate Directors will need to manage the situation within their department in order to continue to maintain County Council services, feeding into the corporate Risk Safety and Emergency Management Board through their departmental Business Continuity lead officer.
- 1.2** However, this must be balanced against the need to consider the extremity of prevailing and anticipated weather conditions. These guidelines have been prepared to assist managers in all departments, but are not exhaustive.

2. Maintaining Services

- 2.1** All avenues should be explored to continue to maintain County Council services. Managers may wish to consider minimal cover being provided by employees who do not have particularly long or difficult journeys home, or by those who do not have specific personal or domestic needs. Also the possibility of diverting services elsewhere as well as using any locally agreed measures that are already in place for emergencies of this nature.
- 2.2** Where cover is required in critical service areas managers may request that staff work additional hours on a volunteer basis. Time off in lieu will normally apply in these circumstances.
- 2.3** In exceptional circumstances, managers may consider it necessary to close an establishment. This should be done in consultation with the Corporate Director or their representative. Suitable notices should be displayed at the entrance of premises to inform the public of the closure and how they may obtain emergency assistance if needed. Answering machine messages with appropriate details should be used where available. Blanket notification of closures using e-mail should only be used where all of the service is affected.
- 2.4** Where a decision has been taken by a Head Teacher to close a school it may be possible for teaching staff to undertake work activities at home. Support staff may also be able to work from home.
- 2.5** Head Teachers should consider the option that school staff report for work to engage in professional activity even where a decision has been taken to close a school to pupils.

3. Employment Issues

- 3.1** Employees should make all reasonable efforts to travel into work during periods of severe weather.
- 3.2** Where managers are satisfied that this has occurred, then employees should not be penalised for non/part attendance. As a guideline, employees should be paid for absences due to severe weather conditions if: -
- the manager is satisfied that every attempt has been made by the employee to attend work.
 - their place of work is closed due to the loss of power/water supplies or damage caused by the weather.
 - normal care arrangements break down at short notice e.g. school closures.
- 3.3** Where appropriate, managers should consider whether it is possible for staff to work from an alternative Local Authority workplace, or to work from home in line with the council's guidelines on Homeworking (see Section B35 Health and safety manual).
- 3.4** Managers should also consider the potential for staff to use flexi time provisions (see Section D 26 Personnel Handbook) to manage their journey into work as necessary.
- 3.5** It may also be appropriate, by mutual agreement, to treat an absence due to severe weather as part of an employee's paid annual leave.
- 3.6** Where employees remain at work to continue to provide County Council services, heating must be maintained at the appropriate level and not turned down. Security must also be maintained and it is suggested that, where practical, there should be a minimum of two people in those premises which are remote or deemed to be vulnerable.
- 3.7** Managers should monitor prevailing weather conditions and the ongoing availability of public transport and risk assess these factors, balanced against critical service needs, to reach and communicate a decision on allowing staff to leave work early if necessary in order to maintain a safe environment for employees when leaving their place of work, particularly where buildings are isolated.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1** In a period of severe weather conditions it is hoped that, with the co-operation and flexibility of managers and employees, arrangements can be mutually agreed in order to minimise the effects on County Council services and its workforce.
- 4.2** Where Managers have evidence that there may be abuse of these guidelines then the council may treat absence, or lateness, as unauthorised absence.

Appendix 2: Guidance for head teachers and nominated property officers about managing building access routes during periods of snow and ice

1. Introduction

1.1 Health and safety legislation requires employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe access to, and exit from, premises used as a workplace. This guidance is issued to assist you in the task of maintaining safety during bad weather, particularly ice and snow.

2. Responsibilities and arrangements

2.1 During adverse weather conditions, the overall responsibility for making arrangements for the clearance of snow and ice and the spreading of salt/grit rests with the Head Teacher or Nominated Property Officer. This responsible person should determine how on site resources are best used particularly the priority areas for snow and ice clearance and the application of salt/grit. A plan for dealing with severe weather should be drawn up in good time for each site.

2.2 Implementation of the plan will normally be the responsibility of site-based employees but they may want to refer to the responsible person for advice in particular circumstances. Details should be drawn to the attention of all employees working on the premises so they are aware of the safest ways of entering and leaving the premises. Reasonable steps must be taken to inform service users and the public of the arrangements.

2.3 Adults, including carers of people in their charge, are expected, legally, to behave as reasonable people. They need to take responsibility for the choices they make during severe weather, although NCC is expected to provide information to inform those choices. Ultimate responsibility for employee's health and safety in LA maintained schools rests with NCC.

3. Factors to be taken into account in drawing up the arrangements

3.1 Factors that should be considered when making decisions about what counts as reasonable steps are:

- a. The number and nature of people accessing the building
- b. The availability of employees able to implement the severe weather plan
- c. The scale of any clearance operations
- d. The nature of the site

3.2 Where there is early warning of snow or icy conditions, the Responsible Person should consider arranging for priority areas to be salted and gritted in advance. Clearly the priority will be for maintaining the main pedestrian

access route to the building. The responsible person will need to use their discretion in determining other priority areas that people may need to use. Signage and other information should be used to inform people about which access routes to use. Snow and ice clearing duties should as far as possible be counted as part of normal working hours of caretaking staff, and as such, other non-essential duties may have to be left. If this causes particular difficulties, contact your caretaking Area Manager.

3.3 As a general rule, NCC is not expected to fully treat or clear its car parks. However, pedestrian routes to and from the car parks must be considered and also whether it is reasonable to clear car park spaces for disabled drivers or specialist transport.

3.4 All staff should be reminded of the need to wear appropriate footwear when coming to work in severe weather conditions as it will seldom be possible to clear all snow and ice from a site. In particular, walking from a parked car to the nearest access path may be more hazardous. Pupils, service users and visitors should be made aware of the arrangements so far as it is reasonable to do so.

3.5 Whatever action is taken, care must be taken not to make ground conditions more hazardous than if no action was taken. Ultimately, decisions about what is reasonably safe is a matter of judgment on the day and this may need to be revised as the weather changes.

3.6 See also:

NCC Winter Weather Plan, Section 3 “Weather Forecasting Capabilities” NCC Winter Weather Plan, Section 5 “Schools” NCC Winter Weather Plan, Appendix 2 “Priority Sites” Service Business Continuity Plans

4. Supply and storage of salt and grit

4.1 In the interests of safety it is advised that salt/grit is the most effective and economical method of over- covering slippery conditions. The Responsible Person must make arrangements to ensure that a sufficient supply of salt and grit is available for use by designated employees at the start of the cold season. Supplies should be ordered well in advance of adverse weather conditions. An appropriate container will enable a reasonable amount of salt and grit to be kept on site ready for use. The container also overcomes the problem of finding a suitable storage space for this bulky and occasionally used commodity. When ordering salt and grit, give consideration to the ability of employees to handle the bags and apply the mixture.

4.2 Important

In the past, there has been at least one instance of pupils in a first school picking some crystalline salt granules off the playground and tasting them, thinking they were snow or ice particles. Heads Teachers and NPOs of buildings with young children are therefore advised to purchase salt/grit mixture rather than pure crystalline salt for treating icy surfaces. Children should be warned accordingly.

5. Safety of employees nominated to spread salt/grit and clear snow and ice

5.1 Nominated employees will be at risk of injury from slipping over and from the task of handling grit/salt and clearing quantities of snow and ice. Suitable clothing and footwear will be needed when working outside. The personal capabilities of the individual must be considered and sufficient time allowed for the task taking account of welfare breaks. A balance needs to be struck, especially at small, low occupancy sites, between the risk to the individual carrying out route maintenance and the risk to small numbers of people accessing the building.

6. Monitoring the effectiveness of the plan

6.1 Arrangements should be made for access routes to be inspected regularly following the salting and gritting to monitor its effectiveness. It is recommended that this is done before the end of each session or working day. Additional information including signage about safe routes may be necessary. Check forecasts and weather warnings again and review the plan if necessary.

6.2 If there are any incidents related to the weather conditions or the task of maintaining the routes these must be recorded on Well worker. Include observations about the ground conditions, measures taken to reduce risk and information about the individual(s) involved, including what they were doing and their footwear at the time of the incident.

7. Checklist for head teachers and NPOs

- Develop a written plan to ensure that clearance of ice and snow and salting and gritting are as effective as possible (See below)
- Receive forecasts about severe weather
- Acquire an adequate supply of salt/grit available, suitably stored with appropriate tools for the moving & distributing the salt/grit.
- Site-based employees have appropriate warm and protective clothing and footwear for the job
- Communication arrangements exist to ensure that employees, pupils and visitors are made aware of the arrangements for safe access to and exit from the buildings?
- There is a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for snow and ice clearing activities.

Contacts: The Health and Safety Team at 01623 434032/3

Appendix 3: Plan for managing access routes during periods of snow and ice

Property name: Orchard Primary & Nursery School

Head Teacher Mrs Jane Chambers

Date: 6.9.2021

Review Dates: 6.9.2022

Weather Warnings

NCC Emergency Planning Team BBC Radio Nottingham / Local Radio Met office:
http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/uk/em/em_forecast_warnings.html

Communication with employees, service users and public (Describe how warnings and advice will be distributed to relevant people)

Details of the routes and areas that will be, where reasonable to do so, gritted and cleared of snow & ice. (Describe routes or provide an annotated area plan)

Location of grit/salt supply and equipment