



**FITCHBURG STATE
UNIVERSITY**

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Severe Weather Procedures

November 4, 2024

Introduction

This document is a functional guide providing procedural direction for a change in campus operational status due to severe or inclement weather, including **closure**, **delayed opening**, or **early release**.

Most often this procedure is implemented for snow and other winter weather events, but may be used for any severe weather that threatens normal operations such as a hurricane, extreme flooding, a tornado, or other hazardous weather which could impact University operations.

Purpose

To enable a consistent, transparent and coordinated cross-department / division response to any inclement weather.

Limitations

Fitchburg State University will endeavor to make every reasonable effort to respond to severe storms or hazardous weather incidents. However, resources and systems may become overwhelmed by the magnitude and nature of a storm and its impacts. There is no guarantee implied by this document that a perfect response to a severe storm or hazardous weather incident will be practical or possible.

Concept of Operations

Roles and Responsibilities *(all of whom serve on the Weather Operations Group)*

Title / Department	Responsibilities
Chief of Police	Assesses campus conditions to assist in reaching an operational status decision, which includes the condition of roadways, parking lots, and sidewalks. Initiates communications with the Weather Operations Group and completes the Severe Weather Closure Matrix. Initiates school-focused internal communications, via RAVE Alert.
AVP Capital Planning & Maintenance	Assesses campus conditions to assist in reaching an operational status decision, which includes the condition of roadways, parking lots, and sidewalks.

	Coordinates snow/debris removal operations and responds to reports of facility damage and such matters. Continues to monitor the weather situation and the reassessment of campus conditions.
President	Seeks recommendations from the Weather Operations Group and authorizes the decision to close, delay, or release the campus early.
Executive Vice President / Provost	Advises the President on the impact to academic operations and fulfills the President's responsibilities when unavailable.
Cabinet	Advises the President on issues related to altering university operations due to severe weather.
Communications and Public Affairs	Receives campus status decision and notifies external media (radio, television, online media).
Housing & Residential Services	Advises the President on issues impacting all university owned properties.

Operations Group

The Weather Operations Group is the primary decision-making body for severe weather events that may impact the university. The Group should receive advanced notice of severe weather forecasts, typically by email, at least **24-48 hours in advance** of the event.

Capitan Planning & Maintenance (or, at times, the University Police Department) will keep the Weather Operations Group informed on the forecast and, if necessary, the University Police Department will coordinate a teleconference call or meeting to provide updated weather briefings to allow for operational decisions. The Weather Operations Group consists of the following personnel:

1. President
2. Cabinet
3. Associate Vice President for Capital Planning & Maintenance
4. Executive Director of Housing & Residential Services

Note: Above list is subject to change and dependent on storm severity

Response Options - Modification of Campus Operational Status

The university has identified three (3) possible response options to modify operations during or after the impact of significant weather:

1. Closing
2. Delayed opening, and
3. Early release

While longer-term options may be modified by the Weather Operations Group, short-term status modifications should always follow one of these three options.

Status	Description	Rationale
Suspended	<p>Normal operations are canceled for the business day.</p> <p>Unless otherwise decided, activities scheduled for the evening are also canceled.</p> <p>Essential services continue.</p>	<p>The campus cannot be safely made ready for the day.</p> <p>The weather impact is forecast to continue or worsen during the day.</p>
Delayed Opening	<p>Activities occurring before the selected opening time are canceled, and activities beginning after the opening time continue as scheduled.</p>	<p>The campus cannot be safely made ready for normal opening time, but is confidently expected to be safe at the selected time.</p> <p>Weather impact has ended or is confidently forecast to end before the opening time.</p>
Early Release	<p>Normal operations are suspended during the business day and employees are dismissed early (the specific time will be communicated).</p> <p>Unless otherwise decided, activities scheduled for the evening are also canceled.</p>	<p>Weather impact during the business day creates hazardous traveling conditions or other problems.</p>

Procedures

Advances in meteorology have made forecasts more accurate. Whenever possible, a suspension of operations or closing decision should be encouraged to be made the evening before an anticipated weather impact based on the confidence of the forecast, expected impacts, and the known or anticipated actions of public authorities. When a decision cannot be made in advance, the status decision should be made and notifications communicated by **5:30 a.m.** to all university personnel on the affected day.

Capital Planning & Maintenance is responsible for monitoring the potential for severe weather. There are two methods of monitoring for weather: active and passive. Capital Planning & Maintenance receives weather related updates from **Precision Weather** (a private service provider) and monitors **National Weather Service** (NWS) Advisories, Watches, and Warnings and determines whether passive or active monitoring is recommended.

- **Passive monitoring** means that there is a chance for winter weather conditions based on forecasts and that Capital Planning & Maintenance will be assessing forecasts for any developments or changes.
- **Active monitoring** means that winter weather conditions are occurring or are imminent and that the Capital Planning & Maintenance staff will be assessing conditions and obtaining data from various sources.

Depending upon conditions and the impact of the storm, active monitoring will commence at approximately **4:30 a.m.**, each day before university classes are scheduled. This will facilitate ongoing assessment of conditions in order to make recommendations to the full Weather Operations Group.

Capital Planning & Maintenance will discuss the forecast with the Chief of Police and if certain conditions exist, request a conference call with the Weather Operations Group. The Chief of Police will schedule the call. The conference call may take place in the evening (typically at **8:00 p.m.**) or early the following morning (no later than **5:00 a.m.**). Each member of the Weather Operations Group will participate, when available.

Prior to any conference call, members of the Weather Operations Group should gather assessments of conditions specific to each of their areas of responsibility so this can be shared on the call, if necessary.

The conference call agenda will consist of the following:

1. Capital Planning & Maintenance will provide campus and regional updates to include:
 - a. Latest Precision Weather and/or National Weather Service forecast for the area, including any posted advisories, watches, or warnings
 - b. Emergency/closing status of state, local and county government
 - c. Status of local road conditions, transit operations and restrictions
 - d. Status of other area colleges and universities
 - e. Status of K-12 school districts in the host and surrounding communities; and,
 - f. Any additional hazards or conditions of concern.
2. Cabinet members in the Weather Operations Group will advise the President on issues related to altering university operations due to severe weather.
3. The guiding principles should focus on public safety and health, with other factors secondary in the final recommendation. (For specific guidance, refer to Appendix A: Campus Closure Analysis Worksheet).
4. The Chief of Police will complete the Severe Weather Closure Matrix.
5. The President will make a final official decision based upon all available information in deciding the status of campus operations (Normal Operations, Closure, Delayed opening, or Early Release).
 - a. **Closure or Delayed Opening** decisions should be made before 5:30 a.m.
 - i. **Delayed Opening** must indicate a specific time at which the campus is expected to be open for normal operations.
 - b. **Early Release** decisions should be made at least 90 minutes before the effective time of the release, when possible.

Community Notification

Immediately following the conference call, the University Police Department will provide notifications regarding any significant change to campus operations through an “**initial**” **RAVE Alert**, using the following methods:

- University email to all members of the campus community
- RSS Feeds
- University Social Media Platforms
- RAVE Guardian

At **6:00 a.m.**, the University Police Department will provide broad-based notifications regarding any significant change to campus operations through a second, or “**6am**” **RAVE Alert**, using the following methods:

- Text messaging
- Voicemail messaging

Continued Monitoring

Capital Planning & Maintenance is responsible for continuing to monitor the weather situation. When a closing or delay has been enacted, Capital Planning & Maintenance will coordinate a reassessment of campus conditions at least three hours before the anticipated end of the closure, following the same procedures outlined for the initial closing, to determine if it is safe to resume normal operations. If necessary, a subsequent weather conference call may be scheduled with the Weather Operations Group.

Appendix A - Severe Weather Closure Matrix

See the attached matrix on the following page(s).



SEVERE WEATHER CLOSURE MATRIX

Incident Type:	Select from Drop Down ▾	Date:	
		Time:	
University Closure - Analysis Worksheet		Check if Pertinent / Notes	
Impacts to Life Safety			
Impending or existing dangerous conditions impacting the FSU community's health/safety	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Injury or death has occurred as a result of the hazardous condition	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Commonwealth of Massachusetts State of Emergency	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Road conditions in the City of Fitchburg are hazardous	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Road conditions in the region are hazardous (North Central Worcester County)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Emergency response to impacted area may be prevented or restricted due to hazardous conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Certainty of Impact			
Certainty level of impending hazardous conditions (Precision Weather / National Weather Service forecast)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Duration of impending hazardous weather is expected to last more than 8-12 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Predicted snowfall totals in excess of five inches (5") within 24 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Snowfall rate greater than 1 inch (1") per hour for more than 2 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Severe cold, wind-chill and/or ice accretions are predicted	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Impacts on University Infrastructure and Facilities			
The incident has interrupted/impacted campus infrastructure (Roadways, gas, electricity, steam, chilled water, phone, and Internet)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
The incident has potential to disrupt staff operations, academics, or special events on campus	<input type="checkbox"/>		
There is significant physical damage to structures on campus	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Parking lots and sidewalks on campus are hazardous, or there is a likelihood of becoming hazardous	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other Factors to Consider		
Fitchburg Public / Regional Schools are either delayed or closed (circle one)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The City of Fitchburg has implemented an emergency parking ban	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other higher education institutions in Worcester County are delayed or closed (circle one)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
State, County, or City government officers are delayed or closure (circle one) I.e., State of Emergency has been issued	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Power outage or utility failure on campus or in the region	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Potential for or existence of physical damage to FSU facilities (heavy snow, ice accretion, high winds)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The inability of CP&M to ensure clear and safe access in parking lots, sidewalks, walkways, and access to buildings	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Complexity Score:		
Recommended Action: <i>For each box checked above, add 1 and develop a total sum</i>		
1-3	Normal Operations: No immediate actions needed at this time	
4-6	Delayed opening: Other operations continue	
7-10	Full closure/classes canceled: All campus operations are canceled - Essential Personnel Report Per Policy	
Action taken (Check one)		
<input type="checkbox"/> 2-hour Delay (if delay, classes that start before _____ are canceled) <input type="checkbox"/> 90-minute Delay (if delay, classes that start before _____ are canceled) <input type="checkbox"/> Day and Evening Classes Canceled <input type="checkbox"/> Early Release (Classes Canceled for the rest of the day) <input type="checkbox"/> Normal Operations (no delay, cancellation, or early closure)		
Comments or Notes:		
Approved by _____		Date: _____

Appendix B - Winter Weather Terminology

Outlook – Hazardous Weather Outlooks are issued every day, and serve as a “heads up” that a significant weather event may be possible in the next 7 days.

Advisory – An advisory is issued when winter weather events could cause a significant inconvenience, but could also lead to life threatening conditions if not cautious.

Watch – A watch is issued when winter weather events have the potential to threaten life and property, but the exact timing and location of the storm is uncertain. Watches are normally issued between 12 to 48 hours in advance.

Warning – A warning is issued when winter weather events are occurring or are imminent and pose a threat to life and property. Warnings are normally issued between 2 and 24 hours in advance.

Winter Weather Product Criteria

(In addition to these thresholds, impacts that cause significant inconvenience or could lead to life-threatening conditions if not cautious)

Advisory Conditions

- **Freezing Rain Advisory** – Small accumulation of ice (freezing rain and/or freezing drizzle), generally less than 1/4 of an inch
- **Winter Weather Advisory**
 - For Snow – Snow accumulation of 3 to 5 inches in 12 hours
 - For Sleet – Accumulation of ice pellets less than 1/2 of an inch
 - For Snow & Blowing Snow – Snowfall with blowing snow intermittently reducing visibility to less than 1/2 of a mile
- **Wind Chill Advisory** - Wind Chill values of -20°F to -29°F

Watch Conditions

- **Blizzard Watch** - Conditions are favorable for a blizzard event in the next 12 to 48 hrs.
- **Winter Storm Watch** - Conditions are favorable for a winter storm event (Heavy Sleet, Heavy Snow, Ice Storm, Heavy Snow and Blowing Snow or a combination of events) to meet or exceed local Winter Storm Warning criteria in the next 12 to 48 hrs.

- **Wind Chill Watch** - Conditions are favorable for wind chill temperatures to meet or exceed Wind Chill Warning criteria in the next 12 to 48 hours.

Warning Conditions

(In addition to these thresholds, impacts that pose a threat to life and property)

- **Blizzard Warning** – Sustained wind or frequent gusts greater than or equal to 35 miles per hour accompanied by falling and/or blowing snow, frequently visibilities less than 1/4 of a mile for at least 3 hours.
- **Ice Storm Warning** – Widespread ice accumulation of 1/4 of an inch or more.
- **Winter Storm Warning** – Heavy Snow (snow accumulation of 6 inches or more in 12 hours, or 8 inches or more in 24 hours), Sleet (accumulation of ice pellets 1/2 of an inch and greater), Ice (accumulation of 1/4 of an inch or more) and/or heavy Snow and Blowing Snow (wind is below blizzard criteria).
- **Wind Chill Warning** – Wind chills -30°F or colder.