

4.1 Storms and Hazardous Conditions

Policy Statement

Provincial offices and worksites will normally remain open during storms or hazardous conditions. Employees are expected to make every effort to report for duty and continue to work during their scheduled working hours. Except for those employees who provide critical business functions as defined in this policy, employees should assess their own ability to get to and from work safely and, where possible, consult with their supervisor/manager. In the case of a storm or hazardous condition, employees may already have an ongoing flexible work arrangement in place to accommodate a flexible work location; may make alternate working arrangements in light of a storm or hazardous condition, with the approval of their immediate supervisor/manager; or make a personal decision to take time off.

In exceptional circumstances, a decision may be made to close some or all provincial offices or worksites, due to extreme storm or hazardous conditions. In only those situations will affected employees be granted leave with pay if they do not have the ability or tools to work from home or another safe location.

Definitions

ALTERNATIVE WORKING ARRANGEMENT

An alternate working arrangement may include working offsite, making up time, or taking advantage of a flexible working arrangement in specific response to the storm or hazardous condition, with the approval of your immediate supervisor/manager.

CRITICAL BUSINESS FUNCTIONS

High priority business activities, programs and services that are essential in meeting the department or government mandate, and which have the highest priority in terms of business continuity and recovery time objective (i.e., the period of time following a disruptive event, within which an activity or operations must be resumed). Employees in designated critical business functions may be able to report to or remain at work or be able to work from home or another safe location, at the direction of their immediate supervisor/manager even if offices or worksites are closed due to extreme storm or hazardous conditions.

DEPARTMENT

Department, office, or public service entity of the Province 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.

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.

FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENT

Flexible work arrangements fall into three broad categories, including 1. flexible work location, such as a schedule for working from home or another location, 2. flexible hours, including variable workday hours, modified work week resulting in earned days off, or a compressed work week, and 3. flexible positions, including job sharing or adjusted work schedule. Formal approval of these arrangements is based on operational and client service requirements.

HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS

Conditions such as those resulting from a storm or other significant disruptive event, that may include poor road conditions, poor visibility, power outages, or flooding. These may result in advisories from traffic authorities or law enforcement on the use of roads and highways, and/or advisories from police, Emergency Management Office or other agencies.

STORMS

Adverse weather conditions, such as heavy snowfall, blizzard conditions, freezing rain, ice, tropical storm, or hurricane.

Policy Objectives

- To establish that provincial offices will only be closed under exceptional circumstances.
- To clarify that individual employees need to make reasonable assessments of their ability to travel to and from work safely during storms or hazardous conditions.

- To clarify work expectations for employees who provide critical business functions who have flexible working arrangements, or who have made alternate working arrangements.
- To ensure a consistent application of leaves and absences requested by employees due to storms or hazardous conditions.
- To establish a framework for decisions to close offices or worksites due to exceptional circumstances.
- To clarify when decisions to close provincial offices are guided by recommendations from the Provincial Storm Committee and when Deputy Heads are responsible for localized closure decisions.

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 Province 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 provincial departments, facilities and services, this policy may not be applicable. These exceptions include some services provided by the Departments of Community Services (e.g., Children in the care of the province), Justice (e.g., Correctional Services, Court Services) and Public Works (e.g., Road Maintenance), and other critical business functions as determined by the departmental heads or as set out in relevant collective agreements.

Policy Directives

PROVINCIAL OFFICES AND WORKSITES REMAIN OPEN

- Provincial offices and worksites will normally remain open during storms or hazardous conditions. Employees are expected to make every effort to report for duty and continue to work during their scheduled working hours.
- Except for those employees who provide critical business functions, as defined in this policy, employees should assess their own ability to get to and from work safely and, where possible, consult their immediate supervisors/managers.
- Employees shall work with their immediate supervisors/managers to determine if alternate or flexible working arrangements are possible in advance of an impending storm/hazardous condition.

- If alternate working arrangements are not possible, employees may make a personal decision to take time off. In such circumstances, time absent by an employee due to storm or hazardous conditions may:
 - i. be made up by the employee at a time agreed upon by the employee and the employee's immediate supervisor/manager, 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 unopened because of a decision by employee(s) that worksite to take time off. In these situations, employees will be required to make up or charge time absent 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/manager for instructions. Having attempted to report for work, these employees may be granted paid leave.
- Reasonable lateness beyond the beginning of an employee's regular shift starting time, as determined by the immediate supervisor/manager, 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/manager that every reasonable effort has been made by the employee to arrive at their worksite at the scheduled time.
- The immediate supervisor/manager may, in the event of worsening storm conditions, and in circumstances where it can be accommodated within operational requirements, allow employees to leave work prior to the end of their regular shift. Employees will not be required to make up this time, if working from home or another safe location is not possible.

CLOSURE AND DELAYED OPENINGS OF PROVINCIAL OFFICES OR WORKSITES

- In exceptional circumstances, a decision may be made to close some or all provincial offices or worksites, due to extreme storm or hazardous conditions.
- Decisions to close provincial offices are guided by recommendations from the Provincial Storm Committee.
- All closure decisions shall be communicated in accordance with guidelines, developed under this policy, as timely as circumstances permit.
- Until and unless employees have directly received a closure notice email, or have been informed by calling the provincial office closure phone line, or their immediate supervisor/manager, they are advised to assume business as usual and to act in accordance with this policy.

- In recognition that weather and other conditions will differ from one region of the province to another, it may be appropriate for provincial offices or worksites in one or more regions to close while others remain open.
- If an employee has the ability and tools to work from home or another safe location on a day where their regular worksite is closed due to hazardous conditions, the employee will be expected to continue working remotely during the worksite closure. All employees with flexible work arrangements based on a flexible work location have the ability to work from home or another safe location. However, if a power outage also impacts the home/safe location of the employee, the employee will be granted leave with pay for their regularly scheduled work hours.
- Employees who do not have the ability and tools to work from home or another safe location will be granted leave with pay for their regularly scheduled work hours when their worksite has been closed due to storm or hazardous conditions.
- Deputy Heads have authority to close specific departmental offices or worksites affected by a localized weather disruption.

Policy Guidelines

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

- Environment and Natural Resources Canada weather forecasts and conditions, weather statements and warnings.
- Department of Public Works road and building reports.
- The presence or threat of other safety hazards.
- Special measures identified by the Emergency Management Office (e.g., state of emergency).
- Local situational reports
- Other available information and agency advisories.
- Departments may issue internal guidelines and use business continuity plans, in alignment with this policy, to assist in administering this policy and to facilitate consistency at regional levels.

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 localized closure decisions, and communication of such decisions, if a provide-wide decision has not been made.

Deputy Heads should also review their department's business continuity plan, in alignment with the provincial business continuity management program framework, in order to ensure their department's viability and determine minimal operational requirements in the event of a storm/hazardous event.

DEPUTY MINISTER OF SERVICE NOVA SCOTIA

Except as otherwise provided for in this policy, the Deputy Minister of Service Nova Scotia is responsible for the decision to close provincial offices in the event of extreme storm or hazardous conditions. The Communications Team at Service Nova Scotia is responsible for communication of closure decisions, in accordance with guidelines developed under this policy.

The Deputy Minister of Service Nova Scotia, along with other deputy heads (when applicable), are responsible for the fair and consistent application of the policy.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

The Public Service Commission is responsible for providing guidance and support to departments and their supervisors and managers on human resource matters arising from this policy.

Monitoring

The Deputy Minister of Service Nova Scotia, in consultation with the Provincial Storm Committee is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness and consistent application of this policy.

References

Civil Service Act

Civil Service Regulations

Master Civil Service Collective Agreement

Public Service Act

Enquiries

Business Continuity Management Office

Service Nova Scotia

BCMops@novascotia.ca

Approval date: **November 28, 2005**

Effective date: **November 28, 2005**

Approved by: **Deputy Minister of
Treasury and Policy Board**

Administrative update: **August 22, 2023**
