

Revised May 2023



INCLEMENT WEATHER RESPONSE PLAN

PIERCE COUNTY HOMELESS SERVICES



Pierce County
Human Services

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1. Introduction

Purpose. The purpose of this Plan is to outline Pierce County Human Services (PCHS) policies and protocols needed to safeguard the lives of vulnerable unsheltered homeless households during inclement weather conditions. Temporary emergency shelter beds will be made available based on threshold criteria and the lack of permanent shelter bed availability. This Plan is a PCHS Plan **ONLY** and does not reflect how the Pierce County Department of Emergency Management (PCDEM) will respond in the event of an extreme weather event. Other local jurisdictions may have inclement weather plans established and will comply with their local plan which may vary and may not exactly align with this plan. This plan covers the entire boundary of Pierce County.

Background. Inclement weather events create an increased safety risk for people living unsheltered. On any given night there are approximately 1,300 permanent emergency shelter beds available in Pierce County. As of May 2023, there are an estimated 6,500 people in Pierce County experiencing homelessness. There are over 2,148 people living unsheltered. The homeless are not a homogeneous group, but consist of families with children, runaways, the elderly, the mentally and physically disabled, alcohol and drug abuse users, and vagrants. Existing public and private funded shelters cannot accommodate all of these individuals, leaving a significant number of the population to seek shelter on the streets where they are exposed to the elements. Due to poor health conditions and lack of adequate clothing, these individuals are extremely vulnerable, especially during periods of inclement weather.

2. Scope

In the event of inclement weather PCHS Homeless Services staff will coordinate access to additional temporary shelter beds and other supplies, such as water, food, transportation, and other items as needed. These items will be available through partner agencies and other local jurisdictions, as applicable. PCHS Homeless Services staff will monitor forecasts and actual weather conditions to determine plan threshold. PCHS Homeless Services staff are alerted to inclement weather conditions through the PCWARN notification system. PCWARN is managed by PCDEM and provides daily briefings, updates and charts provided by the National Weather Service. These notifications provide detailed weather forecasts for the region. Since Pierce County is a large geographically diverse county, stage threshold may vary by region. If weather conditions are identified as “extreme”, PCHS will work with PCDEM to provide additional resources to ensure that unsheltered homeless have access to appropriate shelter and other services.

3. Initiating Inclement Weather Response Activities

The PCHS Director, or their designee, will determine any response to undertake based on weather forecasts provided by the National Weather Service through PCWARN. In some cases, this declaration may be decided within hours of the inclement weather event.

PCHS Homeless Services staff will maintain an active list of contacts from other local jurisdictions and partner agencies identified to respond to such events. During inclement weather events daily conference calls will be coordinated by PCHS Homeless Services staff and include other local jurisdictions and all partner agencies and any other stakeholders.

PCHS Homeless Services staff will work with PCHS Communications staff to ensure PCDEM, stakeholders, local jurisdictions, media, and partner agencies are informed of the inclement weather response. Communication efforts could include, but are not limited to:

- Providing information to 211, Tacoma/Pierce County Homeless Coalition, stakeholders, and other partners about additional shelter capacity and resources
- Providing updates/situational awareness to PCDEM
- Coordinating extreme weather response with PCDEM
- Contacting City of Tacoma, City of Lakewood, and City of Puyallup to coordinate resources
- Contacting homeless service providers regarding additional bed capacity and/or additional resources
- Updating the Tacoma/Pierce County Homeless Coalition website to reflect additional availability of temporary shelter
- When response actions are underway, facilitate daily conference calls with local jurisdictions and partners, including day shelter, overnight shelter, street outreach and Coordinated Entry partners
- Publicize and ensure that all partners are aware that all correspondence with PCHS during an inclement weather event will be communicated using one email address: inclementweather@piercecountywa.gov

4. Inclement Weather Threshold Criteria

Threshold Criteria

Inclement weather response actions may be activated when any one of the following criteria are met:

- Forecasted or actual snow accumulation of more than 1 inch;
- Forecasted or actual temperatures of 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below, snow accumulation, or rain at or near freezing temperatures;
- A period of two or more days where temperatures are forecast to reach 90 degrees or above; or
- The air quality index is at a “very unhealthy” level, see Appendix A. The air quality index used to determine the level of health concern is the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency website.

5. Partner Agencies

Partner agencies include governmental jurisdictions, the Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness, public library systems, public transportation and non-profit agencies providing street outreach, day shelter, overnight shelter and/or Coordinated Entry services. Partner agencies have varied roles and may support response efforts during inclement weather conditions.

Local Jurisdictions

East Pierce County Interlocal Coalition	West Pierce County Interlocal Coalition	Other Local Jurisdictions
Bonney Lake	Lakewood*	Auburn
Buckley	Steilacoom	Eatonville
Carbonado	University Place	Edgewood
Orting		Fife
Pacific		Fircrest
Puyallup*		Gig Harbor
Sumner		Roy
Wilkeson		Ruston
		South Prairie
		Tacoma*

* Lead jurisdictions coordinating efforts in their region

Non-profit Homeless Provider Agencies	Street Outreach	Day Shelter	Overnight Shelter	Coordinated Entry
Associated Ministries				X
Catholic Community Services		X	X	X
The Coffee Oasis			X	
Community Youth Services			X	
Comprehensive Life Resources	X	X		X
Greater Lakes Mental Health	X			X
Homeward Bound in Puyallup	X	X		
Korean Women's Association			X	X
LASA			X	
Life Enrichment Group		X	X	
Multicultural Family Hope Center	X			X
Tacoma Community House/Reach Center	X			X
Rescue Mission	X	X	X	X
United Way				X
YWCA Pierce County			X	

Other Organizations
Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness
Pierce Transit
Tacoma Public Library System
Pierce County Library System

6. Responsibilities

Pierce County Human Services

- ✓ Homeless Services staff will continuously monitor weather alerts, notifications and forecasts to ensure that an early response is initiated.
- ✓ Human Services Director, or designee, will determine inclement weather response.
- ✓ Homeless Services staff will notify all partners and stakeholders of anticipated forecast as quickly as possible.
- ✓ Homeless Services staff will schedule and facilitate daily conference calls at 8:00 a.m. for the duration of the weather incident.
- ✓ Homeless Services staff will assess current shelter capacity and maintain a list of shelter resources added during inclement weather conditions.
- ✓ May make additional financial resources available to non-profit provider agencies, during an inclement weather event, for:
 - Expanding services or extending operating hours and/or capacity
 - Serving populations not served under normal conditions (i.e. single adult shelters may serve youth or households with children and vice versa)
 - Hotels or lodging for staff or populations not typically served
 - Transportation
 - Staffing overtime pay
 - Distribution of supplies (blankets, clothing, food, water, etc.)
- ✓ When extreme weather conditions are forecasted, coordinate with PCDEM to identify space/resources to be used for additional shelter capacity in accordance with DEM policies.
- ✓ Facilitate an annual meeting with other jurisdictions and partner agencies that support inclement weather temporary emergency shelters and services. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure a coordinated response during an inclement weather event.
- ✓ Conduct After Action Reviews of inclement weather events.

Pierce County Department of Emergency Management (PCDEM)

- ✓ Activate the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) based on DEM threshold criteria.
- ✓ Identify and set-up warming/cooling/clean-air centers for the general public (including unsheltered community).
- ✓ Coordinate with Pierce Transit necessary transportation services.

- ✓ Participate in the after-action review process.

Tacoma Pierce County Health Department

- ✓ As needed, plan for, organize, coordinate, and direct public health and medical resources and support within the incorporated and unincorporated areas of the County.
- ✓ Support the after-action review process, including providing data.

Local Jurisdictions

- ✓ Follow local response plan(s).
- ✓ Participate on the daily conference calls as set up and hosted by PCHS Homeless Services.
- ✓ Participate in yearly/seasonal planning efforts with PCHS for inclement weather planning.
- ✓ Participate in after-action review process.

Coordinated Entry Agencies

- ✓ Identify designated inclement weather staff to complete Coordinated Entry conversations with any temporary shelter guest who is not currently connected to Coordinated Entry.
- ✓ Designated staff will be temporarily assigned to designated locations that will be different than their routine work locations.
- ✓ Staff must be available to work evenings, weekends, and holidays as needed.
- ✓ Participate in the daily 8:00 am conference calls when scheduled.
- ✓ Participate in the after-action review process.

Street Outreach Teams

- ✓ Coordinate with other Street Outreach Teams to identify the strategy that will be used to contact 100% of the known locations of unsheltered homeless.
- ✓ Notify unsheltered homeless of inclement weather conditions and availability of shelter beds.
- ✓ Provide inclement weather supplies as needed.
- ✓ Offer and provide transportation to shelter facilities as needed.
- ✓ Staff must be available to work evenings, weekends, and holidays when needed.
- ✓ Participate in the daily 8:00 a.m. conference call when scheduled.
- ✓ Participate in the after-action review process.

Overnight Shelter Operators

- ✓ Assess current shelter bed availability and report bed capacity to PCHS.
- ✓ Increase bed capacity when needed.
- ✓ Complete Coordinated Entry conversations with any shelter guest who is not currently connected to Coordinated Entry.

- ✓ Participate in the daily 8:00 a.m. conference calls when scheduled.
- ✓ Participate in the after-action review process.

Day Shelter Operators

- ✓ Expand access to day shelter facilities to serve additional households.
- ✓ Complete Coordinated Entry conversations with any shelter guest who is not currently connected to Coordinated Entry.
- ✓ Participate in the daily 8:00 a.m. conference calls when scheduled.
- ✓ Participate in the after-action review process.

Safe Parking Operators

- ✓ Coordinate access to adequate indoor facilities.
- ✓ Participate in the daily 8:00 a.m. conference calls when scheduled.
- ✓ Participate in the after-action review process.

7. Definitions

Inclement weather – the existence of rain or abnormal climatic conditions (hail, snow, cold, high wind, extreme high temperatures, unhealthy air quality or the like or any combination thereof) by virtue of which it is either not reasonable or not safe. Generally, multiple climatic conditions occurring at the same time are taken into consideration for response measures.

Extreme weather – any dangerous meteorological phenomenon with the potential to cause damage, serious social disruption, or loss of life.

Temporary emergency shelter - Location/facility designated or set-up to provide short-term, incident specific, shelter to keep people.

APPENDIX A

The Air Quality Index (AQI) is a color-coded tool for reporting daily air quality. It provides simple information on local air quality.

Air Quality Index Table

Levels of Health Concern	Meaning	Colors
Good	Air quality is considered satisfactory. Air pollution poses little or no risk	Green
Moderate	Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants there may be a moderate health concern for a very small number of people who are unusually sensitive to air pollution.	Yellow
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	People with heart and lung disease, older adults, and children are at greater risk from air pollution.	Orange
Unhealthy	Everyone may begin to experience health effects; members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects	Red
Very Unhealthy	Health Alert: everyone may experience more serious health effects.	Purple
Hazardous	Health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.	Maroon