



KCRHA Severe Weather Policy

Activation and Resource Policies for Short-term Emergency Shelter During Extreme Weather

The King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) maintains a regional emergency response for people experiencing homelessness; recommends short-term emergency shelter activation; and leads contract-holder engagement and coordination for emergency planning and preparations for the King County sub-regions, including the City of Seattle.

This Severe Weather Policy describes the agency's policies for expanding emergency resources to people experiencing homelessness during emergency conditions, to be implemented by KCRHA in cooperation with King County, City of Seattle, community nonprofit agencies, local faith organizations, and other community partners and liaisons.

The goal of this document is to provide standards for activation of additional resources to work towards an adequate system of services, including opening safe, short-term emergency day and nighttime shelters, and conducting outreach to unsheltered people. This Severe Weather Response Policy will also serve to support and complement the event-specific playbooks which provide information and procedures for how KCRHA works collaboratively with participating community partners to open and operate short-term emergency shelters in the event of hazardous environmental conditions and/or public health crises.

The policies described in this document are implemented when certain environmental and/or public health conditions are met related to very extreme temperatures, poor air quality or other public health and safety criteria. The degree of plan implementation and interagency coordination needed is contingent on the severity of the emergency, described in three distinct phases. Each phase indicates the type of response needed based upon the severity and length of emergency conditions and the needs of homeless individuals and families to keep them safe.

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Section I: System Activation Criteria

The KCRHA aims to proactively address extreme weather conditions with activation responses that keep people experiencing homelessness safe. KCRHA will partner with regional city offices of emergency management and King County government to monitor conditions and determine the most effective response based on the most up-to-date information. KCRHA is prepared to shift activation responses when conditions change, and as resources are available. The KCRHA system activation includes policy, protocols, and procedures to produce the most effective response to austere conditions.

Activation ranges from access to life-sustaining supplies, and can include opening of [indoor spaces](#) that meet Public Health Seattle-King County (PHSKC) [guidelines](#) for social distancing, air quality and infectious diseases, including COVID-19 [protocols](#). Other activation procedures include community notification, transportation, and site operations.

The criteria outlined in this document are [based on modeling](#) of King County weather conditions from 2018 through 2021. This modeling reflects the use of [Apparent Temperature](#), which is an index that accounts for variable climate factors like humidity, windchill, precipitation and visibility as a more accurate predictor for dangerous conditions. Additionally, King County experiences significant weather variations between subregions, which will require flexible severe weather activation; therefore, local climate conditions should be considered by sub-regions.

1.1. Extreme Weather Activation

King County frequently experiences sustained cold and wet weather during winter months, typically November through March. These months are particularly dangerous for people experiencing homelessness, who often spend prolonged periods of time outside and unprotected from the elements. Exposure to these weather conditions, often with inadequate clothing and supplies, significantly increases the risks of cold-weather related morbidity and mortality. These risks are further increased by a disproportionate burden of underlying medical and mental health diagnoses, which can also markedly increase susceptibility to the dangers of unabated cold and wet weather exposure.

Not only can extreme cold-weather events lead to poor health outcomes; there is a cumulative risk associated with prolonged exposure to even moderately cold temperatures without appropriate supportive measures. It is vital to formulate activation policies with the intent to mitigate risks for hypothermia and cold-related negative health outcomes throughout the duration of the winter season, including temperatures that may not traditionally trigger a larger community-wide emergency response.



1.1.2. Cold Weather Activation

TIER 1 - Increased Outreach and Survival Supplies Distribution	
Daily high temperatures predicted at 45°F or below for 3 days	Apparent Temperature conditions, coupled with low temperatures, predict increased life-threatening conditions
Activation	
Increased outreach through contracted providers and other formal and informal community groups to vulnerable unsheltered people	Providers have access to a shared warehouse/storage space to be used for targeted severe weather life support for people living outside
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - KCRHA communication through email list-serv, scheduled and ad hoc meetings - Geographic prioritization based on forecasted weather conditions - Agencies have access to increased funding that can be used for additional purchase of supplies, distribution of supplies, and increased navigation to get people inside 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easily accessible sites located across the region outreach providers to access - Supplies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Clothing o Harm reduction supplies o Non-perishable food and water o Survival supplies including tents, sleeping bags, etc.

Historical Tier 1 Activation	2018	2019	2020	2021
# of days that reached the threshold	7	25	2	25



TIER 2 - Opening of Short-Term Emergency Shelters			
Activation threshold is met when one or more of these conditions is present			
Daily high temperatures predicted at 40°F or below for 3 days	Daily low temperatures predicted at 35°F or below for 3 days	Snow or rain accumulation greater than 2 inches	
Activation			
Tier 1 actions plus	Open temporary emergency shelters (also known as severe weather shelters), seek expansions to existing emergency shelter programs including 24/7 shelters and night-by-night shelters	Support food distribution to temporary shelter sites	Update communications materials including but not limited to KCRHA's Severe Weather webpage, and flyers, to include up-to-date information

Historical Tier 2 Activation	2018	2019	2020	2021
# of days that reached the criteria	32	51	44	28



TIER 3 - Expanded Emergency Operations		
Activation threshold is met when one or more of these conditions is present		
Daily high temperatures predicted at 35°F or below for a single day	Daily low temperatures predicted at 30°F or below for a single day	Snow/rain accumulation greater than 4 inches
Activation		
All actions in Tier 1 and Tier 2 actions plus-	Coordination with transit and transportation partners to shelter sites	Explore securing storage for belongings to encourage people to come into shelters
Coordinate with cities to open local city halls and other City-owned properties for warming centers and/or 24/7 emergency shelters	Support food distribution to shelter sites and day centers with a focus on snow-ready vehicles	Open emergency daytime warming centers and day centers, including libraries

Historical Tier 3 Activation	2018	2019	2020	2021
# of days that reached the criteria	15	31	12	16



1.1.3. Extreme Heat

Category	Level	Meaning
Green	0	No Elevated Risk
Yellow	1	Low Risk for those extremely sensitive to heat, especially those without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration
Orange	2	Moderate Risk for those who are sensitive to heat, especially those without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration
Red	3	High Risk for much of the population, especially those who are heat sensitive and those without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration
Magenta	4	Very High Risk for entire population due to long duration heat, with little to no relief overnight

While known for moderate, wet weather, King County also experiences periods of dangerously high heat that can cause significant negative health consequences, including death. Public Health – Seattle & King County recommends the activation of overnight and daytime cooling centers when the National Weather Service issues a Heat Advisory. In accordance with our other governmental partners such as Public Health, KCRHA follows the HeatRisk. The categories are not only based on afternoon heat, but also on the effects of overnight temperature in terms of how it either mitigates or augments the effects of daytime heat.

When areas of King County enter into these categories, KCRHA responds with the following:

TIER 1 – Outreach and Preparations	
National Weather Service HeatRisk indicates to “YELLOW” in a sub-region within King County	
Activation	
Dissemination of key public health safety messaging and risk communications to at-risk populations.	Outreach to service providers to evaluate supply needs to support warehouse preparations for potential entrance into tier 2 or tier 3.



TIER 2 – Targeted Resourcing	
<p>National Weather Service HeatRisk indicates to “ORANGE” in a sub-region within King County</p> <p>Includes the above actions in addition to the following conditions:</p>	
Activation	
<p>If ORANGE forecast for only 24 hours for a locality:</p> <p>Partner and support water distribution and other cooling supplies for at-risk communities and populations</p>	<p>If ORANGE forecast lasts more than 24 hours, then take all actions below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner with jurisdictions to selectively activate daytime cooling centers for unsheltered individuals in heat islands/high usage areas - Contact providers to test their HVAC and ice making systems - Scale up other activities required to meet recommendations of Tier 3



TIER 3 - Daytime Cooling	
HeatRisk indicates to “RED” and/or “MAGENTA” in a sub-region within King County	
Includes the above actions in addition to the following conditions:	
Activation	
<p>For forecast RED/MAGENTA lasting only 24 hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeted outreach efforts to reach at-risk populations using 1.6 mile resolution HeatRisk with cooling center communications, cooling supplies and water distribution 	<p>For forecast RED/MAGENTA lasting more than 24 hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeted HeatRisk zone activation of daytime cooling centers for unsheltered individuals; - Stand up cooling tents with misting fans in high unsheltered population corridors, provide hydration supplies; - Outreach: Conduct wellness checks on elders and people living with disabilities to ensure access to air conditioning or cooling centers; - Coordinate transit access to take people to cooling sites; - Partner with jurisdictions to explore expanding hours of operation for cooling centers for unsheltered individuals to accommodate overnight use.

Historical rates of activation for these thresholds are not available given that the NWS HeatRisk tool was only recently developed and implemented in the past year.

1.2.4. Poor Air Quality & Wildfire Smoke Activation

Increased wildfires in the Pacific Northwest have caused periods of unhealthy air quality. Exposure to these conditions can cause immediate and long-term negative health consequences. Due to the continued exposure that our unsheltered population face during incidents of poor air quality and this population often has co-occurring conditions, the RHA will begin activation of cleaner air sites when the Air Quality Index (AQI) is Orange - Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (Index Value of 101–150). Activation at this level is coordinated mask distribution with Public Health Seattle King County and coordination with outreach providers.



Further activation will occur when AQI escalates to Red Unhealthy for All Groups. At this level, KCRHA will work with contracted providers to activate smoke shelters. KCRHA will also follow the wildfire smoke [guidelines](#) set in place by PHSKC.

Given that unhealthy air quality does not have traditional spikes or trends across the day such as with heat, this type of activation requires 24/7 options for people living unsheltered. Cleaner air sites activated by KCRHA will follow [guidelines](#) set by PHSKC. KCRHA will work with community groups to connect vulnerable unsheltered populations to cleaner air sites opening to support the general public.

Section II: Funding Policies

To ensure the system of homeless services can meet the increased need for immediate sheltering when there are dangerous weather conditions, KCRHA has several funding policies to support resourcing to providers. The [approved Five-Year Plan](#) prioritizes several activities, including moving to a seasonal weather shelter model, further regionalization and expansion support to areas outside of Seattle and, ultimately, take over contracting for all jurisdictions. The funding policies to support these transitions are as follows:

2.1. Eligibility

While an entire region may be impacted by severe weather in some form, there are a select portfolio of providers/programs who experience an increase in service population when severe weather hits. Programs that directly interface with people coming from unsheltered homelessness such as day centers, outreach workers, and emergency shelters with drop-in will be the eligible pool for severe weather funding opportunities.

2.2. Funding for Severe Weather

In the annual KCRHA budget, KCRHA will dedicate a portion of the budget to severe weather services. This amount will be determined based on regional utilization data that the KCRHA Weather Emergency Response Crew collects throughout severe weather events, and historical data documenting activation trends. The following are areas of funding KCRHA will offer:

2.2.1. Funding the Stand-up of Severe Weather Overnight and Daytime Accommodations

Per KCRHA's Master Services Agreement with the City of Seattle, KCRHA must oversee and administer a contract with a service provider to ensure severe weather shelter for City of Seattle residents. The procurement of these services is done in accordance with [KCRHA's procurement policy](#).

To ensure geographic coverage and service for all King County, KCRHA will aim to allocate severe weather funding to be distributed in partnership with other public funders regionally.



2.2.2. Funding Severe Weather Allowances in Existing Contracts

This area of expenditure is identified as a Year 1-2 Key Action in the Five-Year Plan: “Incorporate allowances for severe weather shelter response into existing contracts, to support a standardized severe weather response.” Regionally, at least 9 existing emergency shelters expand capacity to accommodate additional people seeking refuge from the elements. These expansions, when fully implemented, make about 80 additional beds available to serve people during cold and snowy weather. During previous activations, providers strained their staff and equipment to meet this need.

Starting in 2023, KCRHA will work with providers to build in spending allowances for severe weather into existing contracts based on a formula that will ensure an equitable distribution of funds amongst all existing providers. In future contract re-procurements, all emergency services contracts (day centers, emergency shelter, outreach) will include a clause for inclusion of an additional funding allowance to use for severe weather response activations in accordance with the tiers indicated in this policy.

2.2.3. Severe Weather Mitigation Supplies

Upon request, the RHA may distribute additional funds for severe weather supplies to Agencies that: (a) meet the eligibility criteria described in Section 2.2; and (b) are not currently contracted with the RHA pursuant to an RFP determination; or (c) have an existing severe weather allowance, subject to the terms and conditions for Micro-purchases described in the KCRHA procurement policy. Agencies that receive additional funds under this provision may utilize funds for heat mitigation supplies, including, but not limited to hats, water, hand warmers, fans, ice machines, sunscreen, socks, etc.

Additionally, KCRHA may evaluate on a case-by-case basis on urgent severe weather needs for all providers that hold a Master Services Agreement with KCRHA to ensure that proper resourcing is happening to prevent death and harm.

Section III: Staffing Policies

3.1. Severe Weather Leads

KCRHA core team leadership will assign one person from the programs team and one person from the external affairs team to serve as the Severe Weather Response co-leads.

Responsibilities of the co-leads are as follows:

- On-call to monitor operations 24/7 through extreme weather event;
- Leads the KCRHA Weather Emergency Response Crew (WERC)



- To carry out the activities outlined in severe weather incident playbooks for smoke, heat, and winter weather.
- To recommend activation actions
- To recommend policy changes to this document to support better operations
- To provide end-of-event reports to leadership

3.2. Weather Emergency Response Crew (WERC)

This team of KCRHA staff is made up of teams that are activated and play a role in carrying out severe weather response. This includes representatives from:

- The Community Capacity Team
- The Sub-Regional Planning Team
- The Program Performance Emergency Services Team
- The Grants Team
- The Communications Team

When in an activated posture, members from each of these teams play a role in severe weather response as outlined in weather event-specific playbooks.

3.3. Activation of KCRHA to Frontline Work

In the event of staffing shortages to support severe weather shelter response around the region, KCRHA leadership will make a call for volunteers internally to support shelter operations. With a viable volunteer pool from internal staff, Severe Weather Response co-leads will coordinate to get staff connected to the program in need of staff support.

KCRHA leadership will not institute a mandatory deployment of KCRHA staff, nor will this type of deployment be undertaken without consultation with union representation and negotiation of terms.

Appendix A: External Partners' Roles in Severe Weather

The Seattle Human Services Department (HSD) serves as the City's Emergency Support Function Lead and partners with the KCRHA. The HSD Director, in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), will review and transmit RHA recommendations about activation of City sheltering sites to the Mayor's Office. The HSD HOPE Team executes emergency transportation within Seattle city limits.



The Seattle Parks & Recreation (SPR) and the Seattle Center (CEN) participate in shelter coordination and activation meetings and advise the Authority and OEM as to site availability. In addition, they provide site access to the Authority and provider contract holders.

The Seattle Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) coordinates access to the City Hall lobby. In the event of resources being exhausted during an activation, they can deliver cots, blankets, and other emergency supplies from the City cache.

The Seattle Office of Emergency Management (OEM) leads emergency response coordination across all City of Seattle departments. Through an inter-agency MOU, OEM will support in escalating connections to city departments for further assistance with resources and information during emergency situations, when the EOC is not activated, and the ESF #6 HSD Emergency Manager.

Agency	Action	Description	Timeline	Point of Contact
HSD	In coordination with KCRHA, assess whether additional cooling options are needed for people experiencing homelessness	Coordinate with KCRHA, OEM, SPR, SPL, Seattle Center, etc to determine whether additional cooling options are needed and if so, develop a strategy to provide additional resources. May include support services, transportation resources, etc.	ongoing, based on forecast	Jill Watson/ Michael Bailey
HSD	Send out extreme weather and safety information to ESF #6 agency distribution list	HSD coordinates an Emergency Support Function #6 (ESF #6) Mass Care, Housing and Human Services group of governmental and non-governmental agencies. Information about extreme weather, safety information and links to resources is sent out to the group to help with their preparations and further dissemination.	ongoing, based on forecast	Jill Watson
HSD	With warning of event, coordinate any additional support	Request heat/safety on-hold messaging; schedule for reporting # of Seattle heat-related calls; phone coverage strategy for off hours	ongoing, based on forecast	Jill Watson



	needed with Crisis Connections 2-1-1			
SPU	Public Drinking Fountain Awareness	SPU publishes locations of operational drinking fountains	Current	Sabrina Register (SPU PIO)
HSD	Monitor Summer Food Program sites for closure or hours adjustments	Communicate with Summer Food Service Sites on their plans to adjust or close services and the communication plan to participants	once event is identified and thru event	Jill Watson/Tina Skilton
HSD	Activate Emergency Call Out list for food banks and meals programs	Monitor changes to food bank and meal program services and whether support is needed to maintain access to food	during event	Jill Watson/ Adrienne Easter
SPD	Community Service Officers - Transportation Assistance	Provide additional surge staffing to assist with transporting vulnerable community members to cooling centers / shelters	Ongoing	SPOC - LT Raguso
PHSKC	Monitor and disseminate data on extreme heat impacts to community health & healthcare system.	Collect data on heat-related illnesses, deaths, and other heat-related impacts to populations. Monitor heat impacts to healthcare facilities. Produce snapshot/sitrep and disseminate to response partners.		PHSKC
OEM	Response Coordination	When a heat event is forecast, OEM convenes an interdepartmental team to plan for and respond to the heat event. This coordination can be virtual or in-person with an EOC activation. This could include activation of the	ongoing, based on forecast	Ken Neafcy



		Joint Information Center (JIC) for public messaging		
HSD	Staff EOC Health and Human Services Branch	If activated, work with OEM to staff the EOC HHS Branch to include SMEs for populations esp vulnerable to heat	EOC activations	Jill Watson
SPR	Opening cooling centers	4 community centers (IDCC, Rainer Beach, Northgate, Hiawatha) have some air conditioning, these can be opened as community cooling spaces during extreme heat		Jon Jainga
FAS	Cooling Center in Seattle City Hall	Sufficient staff will be available to meet added security needs as well as for setup, take down and cleaning of the location before, during and after the event.	As needed	Philip Saunders, Logistics and Emergency Management
FAS	Pet supplies for City Cooling Centers	Seattle Animal Shelter will team up with SPR upon notification of a heat advisory to provide guidance on pet-friendly cooling sites and provide basic pet supplies to city cooling centers, as needed.	As needed	Esteban Rodriguez, Seattle Animal Shelter
FAS	Cooling Center in Seattle City Hall	FAS Facility Operations will ensure that SCH is in 24/7 cooling mode and available to be opened to supplement the City's plans for public cooling locations.	Ongoing	Mike Ashbrook, Facility Operations

