

# RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

## *Severe Weather Action Plans*

*Severe weather may affect Emergency Service Organizations (ESO's) in many different ways. Responding to storm related incidents and calls for service can be stressful for the organization and the communities they serve. Members of the ESO may also be impacted at home and the workplace. The commitment of the ESO to the citizens they serve may require a vast amount of resources if the event is widespread with an extended mitigation period.*

*Having a plan in place may help the ESO be considered a stable and dependable entity during these events. One key to accomplishing this goal is preparation. Written procedures, checklists and guidelines are invaluable to assist the ESO's preparation. This documentation process allows pre-emergency discussions in a non-emergency environment. Written guidelines are also useful to members of the ESO in the event that administrative staff is not available.*

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Written procedures planned in advance can be enacted during an event or an approaching/forecasted event. Some areas to consider are:

***Succession planning:***

An ESO may already have an informal succession plan in place by virtue of the organizational makeup that usually includes a Board of Directors and line/fire officers. However, the ESO must make efforts to document these positions and the responsibilities that accompany them. Training of the identified succession personnel is imperative.

***Staffing and personnel rehabilitation:***

Consider the need for additional staffing during pro-longed events. Rotate staff regularly to help prevent fatigue that may lead to injuries. Provisions may be needed for temporary housing, meals and other personal needs.

***Protection of wall/building openings:***

Structural integrity may be at risk by way of any wall opening during wind related events or roof load from the weight of ice and snow. If storm shutters are not installed make other provisions for protection of these areas such as pre-sized and labeled plywood. Also consider a plan to remove snow from roof tops if it appears to be excessive and unsafe.

*This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization's needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm, or damage to personnel, property, and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control Representative at 800.233.1957.*

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***Securing exterior fixtures:***

Objects outside the ESO can become damaged by wind or cause damage if not secured. Secure identified objects or bring them inside if possible. Examples would be flags, outdoor furnishings, signs, trailers, trash containers, etc.

***Auxiliary power supply:***

Inspect, test and maintain standby power supplies regularly. Run these units under load as much as possible during testing. Consider having formal contracts for priority service and fuel delivery.

***Shutting down commercial utilities:***

If evacuation is planned or imminent, turn off all utilities; extinguish pilot lights for gas appliances; and, shut off fuel sources at all valve locations.

***Preparing for possible flooding:***

Relocate or raise articles subject to flooding, including vital records, and electronic and emergency equipment that are above the anticipated flood level.

***Apparatus relocation plan:***

This plan would be to provide for timely relocation of emergency vehicles to a safe, pre-determined area to prevent possible damage. Use the planning process to identify locations, routes of travel and the timing of the evacuation. Complete prepared public announcements to allow prompt public notification of emergency services shutdown to be broadcast.

***Wind speed restrictions:***

Establish pre-planned conditions when the ESO will not be able to respond during severe weather events. Keep personnel and apparatus safety as the priority when basing maximum speed restrictions.

***Apparatus exposure plan:***

To minimize damage, follow a de-contamination/cleaning plan when apparatus is exposed to salt water, flood water or other contaminants. Depending on the exposure, other administrative steps may be necessary such as contacting your insurance agent.

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**General continuity of operations  
guidelines:**

Continued operations of the ESO will exist in varying levels depending upon the magnitude of the event. The overall severe weather action plan should address the capabilities of the ESO and what those anticipated levels of service will be. These guidelines may deal with other governmental concerns, such as a declaration of emergency/disaster at a local, state or federal level.

Severe Weather Action Plans may be coordinated, developed and distributed in conjunction with the local Emergency Management Agency for your jurisdiction. Use the plan as a basis for training and exercise it annually to help maintain awareness.

Additional resources and reference material can be found at [www.vfis.com](http://www.vfis.com), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA 1616 – 2014 edition), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 29, CFR, 1910.38 (a), at [www.ohsa.gov](http://www.ohsa.gov), Business Emergency Planning Guide at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), and CPG-201, Comprehensive Planning Guide at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov).