

Winter Weather Logistics Priorities and Buildup



With winter fast approaching, we asked **Celeste Duvall** of the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) and **Gail Zuro** and **Kirsten Kuppenbender** from MCEM's Logistics Division to tell us about priorities and preparations for upcoming winter weather.

JOHS applies the policies and principles of our community's initiative to end homelessness, A Home for Everyone, by working with valued partners, crafting innovative solutions, and investing in equity-focused services that include homelessness prevention, shelter, case management, street outreach, housing search support, and rent assistance.

The Logistics Division of Emergency Management is responsible for activating, dispatching, distributing, allocating, and deactivating resources needed for any emergency and disaster operations from government, private, or volunteer sources. They are a newer Division of the County's Office of Emergency Management and are currently focused mainly on supporting other county departments and divisions with COVID-19 efforts, such as Public Health and vaccine clinics. They also support JOHS and Multnomah County's Department of County Human Services (DCHS) in sheltering work for Severe Weather.

What has your agency prioritized in the build-up to this year's winter weather? How has that changed from build-up activities of previous years?

JOHS: We prioritized starting a collaborative work group with DCHS, MCEM, Portland Bureau of Emergency Management and our contracted providers to begin work for severe weather earlier than ever before. We created seven subcommittees to work on key elements of our plan. Focusing on Staffing Training /Recruitment, Staffing Scheduling, Facilities Identification, Facilities Opening Checklists, Outreach, Transportation and Shelter Supplies. This work is completely different from previous years where our contracted providers were the main source of severe weather strategies, with MCEM being only called into response if we hit a Level 3 activation.

Logs: Logistics has two focuses as it relates to Winter Weather. First, we are preparing our drivers and vehicles for inclement weather. Our team has been taking a refresher from our

cohorts at County Fleet about driving on snow along with using chains properly on our vehicles. For our vehicles, we are ensuring we have good chains, a backup set, emergency kit, etc. along with making sure the drivers have good traction devices and other tools they need to work in the weather.

The second focus is supplies. We are ahead from previous years with receiving and distributing materials for both outreach supplies and severe weather sheltering. This includes items such as tents, tarps, sleeping bags, sleeping mats and more.

We've also gotten ahead this year by having four (versus two in past years) trailers plus one POD ready with supplies. We are working with County Fleet about other possible vehicles in the County that would otherwise not be used during inclement weather that we could use for passenger and supply transport.



What are some of the biggest logistical challenges with winter weather?

JOHS: This year with COVID-19 still being in the forefront of all planning strategies, finding and securing facilities large enough for the social distancing that is required to protect staff and participants has been challenging, but with the creation of the Facilities subcommittee we have been able to find more locations than we have ever had before. Facility walkthroughs, and having the necessary use permits and MOU's/IGAs, all need to be in place prior to an activation.

The second logistical challenge this year has been the national supply chain issues. We began purchasing the needed items to set up shelters early knowing that this was going to create a lag in delivery times. However, even in doing this early purchasing we are finding that some orders we have placed two months ago are still not delivered and are stalled either on a ship, a loading dock or a warehouse waiting to be picked up and delivered.

Thirdly, transportation to shelters not only for our participants but staff as well in inclement weather is always challenging. Especially if the weather is so bad it shuts down the mass transit systems. Knowing this we created the Transportation subcommittee to review previous years and to problem solve around this issue. Different tiered options for staff/guests and supplies have been outlined in the plan. A comprehensive list of every County and City vehicle that is prepared to activate during a severe weather event has been created, as well as a list of all County and City drivers who have completed the severe weather driving course.

Logs: Having enough vehicles and drivers that are able to drive in the conditions we find ourselves in. We hope this year to have plenty of vehicles thanks to help from Fleet and other departments with vehicles. We need drivers to volunteer and be able to get where the vehicles will be staged.

Supply chain has impacted our ability to get all the supplies in a timely fashion, but we are close to having everything ready.

How will COVID affect logistics operations this year? Are there lessons learned from last year's COVID operations?

JOHS: COVID-19 affects every aspect of the planning for severe weather. Keeping staff and participants safe not only from the elements, but from the transmission of Covid-19 in severe weather shelters is a priority. All staff who work in any shelter must be vaccinated and have completed the attestation document prior to working in a shelter. We learned from last year the need to be extremely proactive in creating a plan that was cohesive and prepared around all COVID-19 guidelines and protocols. Because of this work last year we had no one test positive for COVID-19 or any outbreaks in any of the severe weather shelters we provided.

Logs: We've been working under COVID rules since our Division has been around so nothing new for us. As always, we will take precautions when driving with other people in the vehicles.

What are some ways that the community can help or donate?

JOHS: We could not do this work without the community's assistance. If someone would like to be part of our response they can either connect with Transition Projects to sign up to help in a severe weather shelter, or they can reach out to 211 which has a list of our contracted providers and their wish lists for donations needed to continue doing this lifesaving work through their outreach teams. Most of these providers have made it very simple to help by creating an amazon account where all anyone has to do is look at the needs list and click on the items they wish to purchase/donate, and it will be delivered directly to that provider.

Logs: Become a County Volunteer! We are always looking for community members to pitch in not just during severe weather but all throughout the year!