

DEKALB POLICE DEPARTMENT

Subject: **Severe Weather Emergencies**

Policy #: **407.8**

Effective Since: 7-18-12

Revision Effective: 1-1-19

FTO Training Task: # 48

Reference Material: Severe Weather Preparedness, IEMA

ILEAP Standards Covered: NA

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PURPOSE: It is the purpose of this policy to outline operating procedures during severe weather emergencies.

POLICY: Severe weather can significantly impact and affect operations. Recommended procedures will vary with the specific type of weather being experienced. Supervisors should always weigh the risk versus benefit when making decisions regarding operations that expose personnel to adverse weather conditions. Officers must be prepared to alter, suspend, or terminate operations should conditions change rapidly and pose an unreasonable risk to personal safety or property.

STORM DEFINITIONS, from the National Weather Service:

Severe or hazardous weather: any weather condition which creates a risk or hazard when responding to or operating at an incident. This includes, but is not limited to: fog, heavy rain, hail, flooding, lightning, high winds, tornadoes, ice storms, and snowstorms.

Tornado Watch: Conditions are favorable for the development of severe thunderstorms and a significant threat of tornadoes in and close to the watch area. These watches are issued for large areas by the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma, and are usually valid for four to six hours.

Tornado Warning: Strong rotation in a thunderstorm is indicated by Doppler radar or a tornado is sighted by spotters. These warnings are issued by the local Weather Forecast office in Chicago/Romeoville.

Severe Thunderstorm Watch: Conditions are favorable for the development of severe thunderstorms, but with a lower risk of tornadoes, in and close to the watch area. These watches are issued for large areas by the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma, and are usually valid for four to six hours.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning: A severe thunderstorm is indicated by Doppler radar or sighted **by spotters. A severe thunderstorm contains large damaging hail**, one-inch diameter or larger, and/or damaging winds of 58 mph or greater. These warnings are issued on a county by county basis by the local Weather Forecast Office in Chicago/Romeoville.

Flood Watch: Conditions are favorable for flash flooding in and close to the watch area. These watches are issued by the Weather Forecast Office in Chicago/Romeoville and are usually for the first 24 hours of a forecast.

Flash Flood Warning: Flash flooding is occurring, imminent or highly likely. A flash flood is a flood that occurs within 6 hours of excessive rainfall and that poses a threat to life and/or property. Ice jams and dam failures can also cause flash floods. These warnings are issued on a county by county basis by the local Weather Forecast Office in Chicago/Romeoville and are generally in effect for up to 6 hours.

Flood Warning: General or areal flooding of streets, low-lying areas, urban storm drains, creeks and small streams is occurring, imminent, or highly likely. Flood warnings are issued for flooding that occurs more than 6 hours after the excessive rainfall. These warnings are issued on a county by county basis by the local Weather Forecast Office in Chicago/Romeoville and are generally in effect for 6 to 12 hours.

PROCEDURE:

- A. **Severe Thunderstorm or Tornado Watch:** The shift supervisor and telecommunicators should monitor weather conditions, weather reports, and weather radar when DeKalb County is under a severe weather watch of any kind, as issued by the National Weather Service. On-duty personnel should be advised of the watch.
- B. **Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** When the National Weather Service issues a severe weather warning for DeKalb County, the shift commander shall:
1. Ensure that Communications personnel are aware of the warning and monitoring the weather radar.
 2. Notify all personnel working by radio or computer message about the warning. The Communications Center can also make this advisement upon receiving a warning notice.
 3. If it appears the severe storm will last for an extended period of time, or generate several inches of rain, or include sustained winds above 60 MPH, notify the Street Department Director, and Fire Department Shift Commander.
 4. Continue to monitor the weather situation, as severe thunderstorms can produce tornadoes without warning.
 5. Make any adjustments to police response as necessary for safety.
 6. After the storm passes, coordinate with the fire department to check any affected areas for damage or casualties.
- C. **Tornado Warning:** In the case of a tornado warning issued by the National Weather Service for an area that includes any part of the City of DeKalb as indicated in the warning message, or any part of the city is located within the National Weather Service radar display polygon, or upon the direct report of a tornado or rotating funnel cloud in the immediate area:
1. The communications center shall sound the emergency siren immediately when the storm reaches within ten miles of city limits. The alarm shall sound continuously until the threat of the tornado has passed.
 2. The shift commander or telecommunicators shall make the following notifications:
 - a. Notify all on-duty personnel by radio about the tornado warning
 - b. Notify the on-call Commander and Chief of Police.
 - c. Notify the Director of Public Works, the Street Department Director, and the Fire Department Shift Commander.
 3. On-duty personnel should continue to monitor the weather situation.
 4. Be prepared to open the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
 5. **If officers find themselves in the path of a tornado**, they should consider the following options:
 - a. Avoiding the tornado if time permits, moving at right angles away from the tornado.
 - b. Leave the squad car and seek shelter in the basement of a house or building.
 - c. Officers should understand that the squad car itself will provide little if any protection from flying debris but can also be easily swept up in a tornado.
 - d. As a last resort, abandon the squad car and seek shelter in a ditch or culvert.
 - e. When seeking shelter, officers should be aware of flying debris and avoid overhead power lines or other hazards.

6. If employees at the police department, including Communications personnel, feel the building is in the imminent path of a tornado, they should seek shelter in the locker room. Prisoners should be placed in an interior cell.

D. **Tornado Strike**: If a tornado strikes DeKalb, the shift commander should follow the City's Emergency Plan as follows:

1. Check with all working employees to ensure their safety and location.
2. Notify the National Weather Service at 800-681-2972 as time permits. Areas in the path of the storm can benefit from information that is passed along.
3. Be sure the Chief, City Manager, and other department heads are reporting to duty.
4. Call in additional personnel to duty.
5. Initiate the opening of the EOC, following the established plans in the City's Emergency Plan.
6. Coordinate a damage survey of the city with the Fire Department; the police department will specifically be checking the far north and far south areas of the city in particular.
7. Ensure the prioritization of assistance. The survey should be completed before responding to calls for service. Immediate threats to life need to be handled first.
8. Initial operational procedures will likely involve the following events, as provided by a range of emergency responders:
 - a. Care of the injured.
 - b. Search for victims.
 - c. Freeing entrapped victims.
 - d. Extinguishment of fires.
 - e. Sealing off broken gas mains.
 - f. Turning off electrical power.
 - g. Establishing communications.
 - h. Stabilizing unsafe structures.
 - i. Opening shelters and providing mass care.
 - j. Establishing a perimeter around affected areas.
 - k. Removing debris from critical routes.
 - l. Being aware of or responding to criminal activity and looting.
 - m. Conducting aerial surveillance.
 - n. Submitting damage assessment reports.
 - o. After an actual tornado, the National Weather Service will also be assigning personnel to conduct a damage survey to assign an EF-scale rating of the tornado.

E. **Emergency Operations** : During an actual emergency involving a significant severe thunderstorm, tornado, flooding, or other catastrophic weather event, the Chief or designated supervisor will ensure the following operations:

1. The utilization of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
2. The use of a disaster assignment board to depict where employees are working, what equipment is being used, and what type of emergency is being handled, after the damage survey has prioritized assignments.
3. **Be sure Communications personnel or a designated employee is specifically recording emergency response information in written form :**
 - a. Incident number
 - b. Time of emergency calls received
 - c. Location of emergency calls

- d. Nature of emergency calls
 - e. Employees and vehicles assigned to emergency calls
 - f. Amount of time spent at emergency calls
 - g. Any other pertinent information
 4. The operation of the EOC will be NIMS-compliant (National Incident Management System) with all relevant functions staffed.
 5. Additional manpower through ILEAS will be summoned upon approval by the Chief. The primary mutual aid number is 847-590-3500 and the secondary mutual aid number is 309-494-8000. Other than basic information, the following items are also required when making the call:
 - a. Staging areas.
 - b. Areas or routes to avoid.
 - c. Radio contact frequency for staging command (if known), such as ISPERN, IREACH, Starcom, etc.
 - d. Other special details or instructions for responding personnel.
 6. Once the disaster response is determined to be over, an announcement will be made over the police and fire radio frequencies.
 7. A debriefing shall transpire before emergency workers go off duty to ensure the exchange of information and any needs that require further attention.
- F. **Lightning**: Personnel working under lightning conditions should take extra care to ensure their personal safety and the safety of others. Personnel not actively involved in emergency operations should remain inside vehicles or buildings during frequent local lightning. The following safety rules should be employed:
 1. Suspend outdoor operations except for emergency needs.
 2. Officers will not engage in opening vehicles for locked-out motorists when lightning is occurring in the area. Locked-out motorists should be instructed to take shelter in nearby buildings.
 3. If outdoor activity is necessary and there is no shelter available:
 - a. Avoid the highest object in the area.
 - b. Do not take shelter under trees.
 - c. The best protection is often to crouch down, keeping twice as far away as the height of the nearest tallest object.
 - d. Avoid hilltops, open spaces, wire fences, power lines, metal structures or objects, and any elevated objects.
 4. When encountering victims struck by lightning, engage in typical first aid response, including the use of CPR and an AED.
- G. **High Winds**: Personnel working in high-wind conditions should take extra care due to the following potential hazards:
 1. Flying debris.
 2. Vehicle stability while driving.
 3. Personal footing and stability when outside the vehicle.
 4. Diminished visibility.
 5. Proximity to power lines.
 6. Presence of downed power lines.
 7. **If straight-line winds reach 75 MPH as determined by the National Weather Service or other reliable source in or upon the approach of DeKalb County, the procedures for a tornado warning will be employed, including the sounding of the emergency siren.**
 8. If available, eye protection should be worn when exposed to high wind conditions.

- H. **Flooding**: Officers should use considerable judgment and discretion relative to personal safety when entering flooded areas.
1. Personnel should never enter water more than two feet deep without flotation devices.
 2. Avoid run-off areas, drains, open manholes, and ditches.
 3. Vehicles should not be driven into areas where water depth cannot be reliably determined.
 4. The locations of flooded roadways should be reported to the communications center.
 5. Buildings of any kind that are being flooded or at imminent risk of being flooded should be reported to shift commander, who will notify the Director of Public Works and the on-call Commander.
 6. The Communications Center will log any flooded areas and be sure the fire and street departments are aware of roadways that may be closed due to flooding.
 7. National Weather Service flood warnings for DeKalb will indicate areas that will flood at various Kishwaukee River levels.
- I. **Heavy rain**: Rain will not have much effect on police operations, other than using increased caution during response. Officers should be aware of roadway issues such as large puddles, flooding, and hydroplaning. Officers are not expected to remain outdoors in heavy rain except to handle emergency calls.
- J. **Fog**: Due to limited visibility during patrol or responding to calls, officers should take the following precautions:
1. Drive at slower speeds that allow for stopping within sight distance.
 2. Remember that emergency lighting is more difficult for others to see.
 3. Routine patrol should be suspended during periods of extremely dense fog.
- K. **Hail**: When encountering hail conditions, officers should wear hats and coats if outdoor exposure is necessary. Officers are not expected to remain outdoors in hail conditions except to handle emergency calls. Even during emergency calls, officers should avoid exposure to hail one inch in diameter or larger. Riot helmets could potentially be worn in emergency situations to reduce risk of injury from large hail. Hail size should be reported to the National Weather Service if time permits.
- L. **Winter Weather Definitions**, from the National Weather Service:
- Winter Storm Watch - Conditions are favorable for hazardous winter weather conditions including heavy snow, blizzard conditions, or significant accumulations of freezing rain or sleet. These watches are usually issued 12 to 36 hours in advance of the event by the National Weather Service Chicago office.
- Winter Storm Warning - Hazardous winter weather conditions that pose a threat to life and/or property are occurring, imminent or likely. The generic term, winter storm warning, is used for a combination of two or more of the following winter weather events; heavy snow, freezing rain, sleet and strong winds. The following event-specific warnings are issued for a single weather hazard:
- Blizzard Warning - Sustained winds or frequent gusts of 35 mph or greater, considerable falling and/or blowing snow reducing visibility frequently to 1/4 mile or less for a period of three hours or more. There are no temperature criteria in the definition of a blizzard, but freezing temperatures and 35 mph winds will create single digit wind chills.

Heavy Snow Warning - Snowfall of 6 inches or more in 12 hours or less, or 8 inches or more in 24 hours or less.

Ice Storm Warning - Accumulations of 1/4 inch or more of freezing rain.

Heavy Sleet Warning - Accumulations of 1/2 inch or more of sleet.

Winter Weather Advisory - Hazardous winter weather conditions are occurring, imminent or likely. Conditions will cause a significant inconvenience and if caution is not exercised, will result in a potential threat to life and/or property. The generic term, winter weather advisory, is used for a combination of two or more of the following events; snow, freezing rain or drizzle, sleet, blowing snow. The following event-specific advisories are issued for these single weather hazards:

Snow Advisory - Snowfall of 3 to 5 inches.

Freezing Rain Advisory - Accumulations of less than 1/4 inch of freezing rain or freezing drizzle.

Sleet Advisory - For accumulations of less than 1/2 inch of sleet.

Snow and Blowing Snow Advisory - Sustained winds or frequent gusts of 25 to 35 mph accompanied by falling and blowing snow, occasionally reducing visibility to 1/4 mile or less.

M. **Snowstorms:** In the event of a major snowstorm, officers should take the following precautions:

1. Routine patrol should be suspended during periods of heavy snowfall.
2. Avoid roadways that are impassable due to unplowed snow.
3. Allow additional time for traveling to work and to calls for service.
4. Emergency driving may not be possible during or following snowstorms.
5. If a snowplow is needed to assist response to an emergency call, contact the shift supervisor or communications center for assistance.
6. Take precautions against frostbite and cold exposure by wearing appropriate clothing including hats, gloves, heavy jackets, and boots.
7. The shift commander should notify working personnel if a Winter Storm Watch has been upgraded to a Winter Storm Warning or Blizzard Warning.

N. **Freezing Rain / Ice Storms :** Precautions as listed in the preceding section for snowstorms should be taken. In addition, officers should be alert for additional **hazardous conditions such as downed wires. It takes about 3/4"** of ice to bring down overhead power lines.

Policy originally issued 7-8-12; this revision becomes effective on 1-1-19 by authority of the Chief of Police .

NOTE: This policy and procedure summarizes the department's position on this specific matter. This policy is for general direction and guidance primarily designed for use by the department's members. This policy is for internal use only and does not create or enlarge an officer's liability in any way. This policy shall not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violations of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of an internal departmental complaint and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

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