


Inclement Weather and Natural Disasters– Leave Use and Suspension of Operations

POLICY NUMBER:	PERSONNEL 003
REFERENCE:	STATE RULES: <u>CHAPTER 357-31 WAC - SECTIONS 255-280</u> FEDERAL LAWS: <u>FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT</u>
EFFECTIVE DATE:	MAY 24, 2019
SUPERSEDES:	PO03 INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY–JANUARY 9, 2017
APPROVED:	

POLICY STATEMENT

Employee safety is a priority at RCO. When making decisions to continue, alter, or suspend the agency operations, executive management will consider the safety of its employees. *Employees also should assess their safety when severe inclement weather, natural disasters, or other emergency conditions affect their ability to report to work.*

This policy applies to all RCO employees and interns. For represented employees, the collective bargaining agreement supersedes specific provisions of agency policies if there is a conflict.

This policy identifies who has authority to suspend office operations, how information will be communicated to staff, types of leave that can be authorized, and expectations when severe inclement weather, natural disaster, or other emergencies occur that alter or suspend RCO's operations.

DISCUSSION

When, through Governor directive, weather alerts, building hazard reports, or other means, it is determined that employee safety, health, or property is jeopardized due to weather, natural disaster, or other emergency situation, the director is responsible for determining when to suspend or alter any portion of RCO's operations. If the director is unavailable, the deputy director will make the decision. If both are unavailable, the agency's Continuity of Operations Plan identifies the succession for decision-making authority.

OFFICE HOURS

The standard business hours for the RCO office shall be from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, with the exception of authorized holidays as defined in Washington Administrative Code 357-31-005, or as suspended or altered by this policy.

COMMUNICATION

During severe weather, natural disasters, or other emergencies, agency communication systems may be interrupted. This can make communication challenging during already difficult times. To limit misunderstandings, communications will be a shared responsibility of both management and employees.

If employees have questions about this policy or are unsure about any expectations or issues during an emergency situation, they are to ask their supervisors. If supervisors are not available, any other management team member may be contacted.

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION

RCO will communicate in a variety of ways in the event of an emergency, in-person conversations, voice mail, e-mail, written letter, text message, and/or posting information on the RCO intranet/Internet. Staff will be notified via text, and the RCO emergency notification message will be updated. Staff should check the emergency line before proceeding to work if they have not heard from a supervisor in an inclement weather situation.

RCO's emergency notification telephone number is **(360) 725-3942**. The recorded message will be updated daily by 7 a.m. when the agency is non-operational due to severe weather, natural disaster, or some other emergency. The message may be updated periodically during the day as situations and information changes. It is recommended that staff store the emergency notification number in their phone contacts.

In addition, RCO has the ability to send agency-wide text messages to all staff state-owned cell phones or to personal numbers, which staff authorize RCO to communicate with. RCO will keep a list of staff contact phone numbers. Text messages will be sent alerting staff to severe weather shut downs, delays or other emergency activities.

EMERGENCY EMPLOYEES REQUIRED TO WORK

Due to business needs, some employees still may need to work even if agency operations are suspended. Those employees who are required to work will receive their regular rate of pay for work performed during the suspended or altered operations. Any overtime worked will be compensated in accordance to federal and state laws.

The appointing authority may petition the Office of the State Human Resources Director for approval of a special premium pay allowance due to hazardous working conditions encountered by employees required to work during the period of suspended operations.

EMPLOYEE LEAVE WHEN OFFICE IS OPERATING NORMALLY

Up to 1 hour will be allowed at the **beginning** of the employee's work shift, if the employee is late coming to work due to inclement weather, without charging the employee's leave.

When RCO determines that inclement weather conditions or a natural disaster exist but the work location still is operational, an employee may chose not to work. Leave should be taken until depleted in the following order:

1. Any compensatory time or previously accumulated exchange time.
2. Any accrued vacation leave.
3. Up to 3 days of accrued sick leave within any calendar year.

Staff may request to use their personal holiday, personal day (for union represented employees), or leave without pay rather than vacation or sick leave.

WORKING FROM HOME

At times individual employees may be impacted by inclement weather due to the location in which they live. In this case, the employee may request to work from home during inclement weather, natural disasters, or other emergencies. The supervisor must approve the request and determine what work is to be completed during that time.

EMPLOYEE LEAVE WHEN RCO OPERATIONS ARE ALTERED OR SUSPENDED

When RCO alters or suspends its operations due to weather, natural disaster, or other emergency:

1. Employees covered under the terms and conditions of the collective bargaining agreement should review [Washington Federation of State Employees \(WFSE\)](#) Article 16 (Severe Inclement Weather and Natural Disaster Leave) and Article 31.6 (Temporary Reduction of Work Hours or Layoff–Agency Option).
2. Non-represented employees are governed by civil service rules and agency policy and should review [WACs 357-31-255 through 357-31-280](#).
3. General guidance for both represented and non-represented:
 - a. Employees will be released with no loss of pay during the disruption of service, or
 - b. Reassigned to work from home or other locations within a reasonable driving distance from the Natural Resources Building, if possible and appropriate, or
 - c. At the discretion of the director, following the bargaining agreement and agency layoff procedures and with appropriate notification, non-emergency employees may be subject to a temporary reduction of work hours or temporary layoff until the office is operational.
4. When an employee already is on pre-approved leave, that leave will apply even though the office may have been shut down due to inclement weather, natural disasters, or other emergencies.
5. When an employee is scheduled to work remotely, telecommute, or is on a flex day schedule, they will be expected to work as normally assigned if their location is not impacted by the event. If you are not sure what you should do, contact your supervisor for additional guidance.

REMOTE WORK AND HOME-BASED OFFICE

Inclement weather and emergencies may impact an individual employee whose official duty station is not the Natural Resources Building in Olympia. (For instance, a severe storm in Spokane may affect an employee while Olympia is not impacted.) In this case the employee

should work with their supervisor and the agency deputy director to determine how to deal with the situation using this policy as guidance.

OPERATIONS SUSPENDED FOR MORE THAN 15 DAYS

Suspended operations must not exceed 15 calendar days without the state human resources director's (within the Office of Financial Management) approval. At the discretion of Executive Management, non-emergency employees may be subject to temporary reduction in hours or a temporary layoff in accordance with bargaining agreement and agency layoff procedures.

RELATED POLICIES

- RCO Continuity of Operations Plan
- Modern and Mobile Work Environment
- Employee Safety
- Layoff Policies

PROCEDURES

Role	Action
Director	Determines when safety, health, or property is in jeopardy due to weather, natural disaster, or other emergency and to suspend or alter any portion of RCO's operations. The director may delegate this responsibility as appropriate.
Deputy Director or Executive Assistant	Updates RCO's emergency notification telephone message by 7 A.M. when the agency is non-operational due to severe weather, natural disaster, or some other emergency. May update periodically during the day as situation and information changes.
Executive Management	When operations are altered or suspended due to severe inclement weather, natural disaster, or other emergency, Executive Management will communicate what changes are expected and what employees are expected to do. Written communications (in the form of agency email and/or text messages) will be sent to all employees if and when RCO actually suspends its operations. Information will include why operations are suspended, how long the suspension is expected to last, when employees are expected to check in or report to work, and how employees will account for time lost from work.
Supervisors	Supervisors will periodically review with their staff the policies and processes used to share information during severe

Role	Action
	<p>weather, natural disasters, or other emergencies. Supervisors will also be the conduit for sharing information with staff when other communication methods (emergency notification line, e-mail, intranet, and Internet) are not working. Supervisors will set expectations on hearing from employees about their personal statuses. When a supervisor has not heard from an employee, the supervisor will call, text, and/or e-mail the employee to inquire about his/her status.</p>
<p>Employees</p>	<p>In case of inclement weather, natural disaster, or other emergency, employees may call the emergency notification line or contact their supervisor to determine if management has altered or suspended RCO operations.</p> <p>Employees will keep their supervisors informed of late arrival or absence from work due to inclement weather, natural disaster, or other emergency. Employees will do this by directly contacting their supervisors. If their supervisors are not available, employees will share that information with another team member.</p> <p>When the telephone system is not available, employees will communicate using the most direct communication method available to them. When talking with their supervisors or leaving messages, employees should let supervisors know what communication methods are available to them.</p>