

# HAZARDOUS WEATHER RESPONSE PLAN FOR UNSHELTERED THURSTON COUNTY RESIDENTS

2022-2023

## Purpose

To prevent harm experienced by unsheltered residents in Thurston County during Hazardous Weather Events, this plan is designed to coordinate levels of response efforts, minimizing the impact on daily life for vulnerable populations.



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## Introduction

This Hazardous Weather Response Plan is drafted for implementation November 1, 2022 through October 31, 2023. The Hazardous Weather Response Plan for Unsheltered Thurston County Residents (HWRP) utilizes a county-wide, multi-agency, multi-disciplinary approach to expand services to minimize illness and death among unsheltered houseless persons during normal and extreme weather events. Responses guided by this approach occur during defined weather conditions and are called “Regular/Seasonal,” “Hazardous Weather Event (HWE),” and “Emergency,” respectively. The HWRP plan is a living document to be revised through the experience of successive hazardous weather events. A review of this plan will be initiated prior to the onset of the Cold Weather Season (November 1- April 30) each year. The HWRP is drafted by a committee of community advocates and county departmental staff on behalf of Thurston County residents who are unsheltered. It is intended to improve communications, clarify responsibilities, and reach agreement on procedures with participating agencies for Level 1: Seasonal, Level 2: Hazardous Weather Events, Level 3: Emergency and Level 4: Deactivation.

## Partners/Organizational Roles

An additional component of the plan is to provide an opportunity for those experiencing homelessness or other vulnerable populations to seek more reliable shelter. Thurston County has a three-door coordinated entry system: 1) Single Adults 2) Families 3) Youth and Young Adults (YYA). The purpose of a Coordinated Entry system is to ensure that any individual (family, single adult, or YYA) has easy access to housing services- including shelter, rental assistance, and case management. Through a system that is easily accessible, the Coordinated Entry System aspires to operate with a “no wrong door” approach. Thurston County has contracted with the Family Support Center (FSC) as the lead Coordinated Entry agency. FSC subcontracts with Olympia Mutual Aid Partners (OlyMAP) to serve single, childless adults, and Community Youth Services (CYS) for youth and young adults up to age 24. Coordinated Entry services are available at each of the provider locations, as well as via a 24-hour toll free hotline (844-628-7343).

The County contracts with select agencies who provide regular/seasonal shelter services, to provide expanded cold weather and/or hazardous weather shelter for these populations, in addition to their normal roles as shelter providers. Additionally, in lieu of adequate shelter bed space, the county contracts with select outreach agencies to provide necessary Shelter-in-Place (SIP) activities for households unable to access shelter during extreme weather or hazardous weather events.

*The descriptions and functions of participating agencies providing regular/seasonal shelter can be found in **Appendix 1: Key Partners/Organizational Roles**. Agencies that are contracted to provide cold/hazardous weather response are highlighted in blue.*

## The Need

Hypothermia occurs when a person’s core body temperature falls below 95 degrees. According to the National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, people living outside experience 3 to 6 times the risk of hypothermia than housed people due to rain, wind, and cold temperatures. Use of alcohol, nicotine, and narcotics commonly increase the threat of hypothermia and other life-threatening illness. Our area is prone to powerful winter storms that are often accompanied by high winds and heavy rains. Other hazardous weather events include but are not limited to: poor air quality due to wildfire smoke,

flooding in the lowlands, periods of extreme heat. These weather events can make it difficult for unsheltered people to meet their basic life needs and can cause serious injury or preventable death. Efficient design and timely service delivery are essential to mitigating health risks.

## Primary Operational Overview

### Level 1: Regular/Seasonal

Seasonal is defined as area normal weather patterns specific to each season. Services offered during “Seasonal” are delivered as per annual contracts based on respective Conditional Use Permitting (CUP) for available bed-nights in overnight shelters and year-round outreach activities.

### Level 2: Hazardous Weather Event (HWE)

A hazardous weather event is a countywide action and is a necessary interim level between Seasonal and Emergency.

The primary function of the HWE level is the immediate increase in the number of overnight shelter beds available, outreach to those sheltering in place, and additional day time indoor sheltering for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness or other vulnerable populations during a hazardous weather event. Expanded overnight shelter beds, daytime shelters, and shelter-in-place activities during a hazardous weather event are conducted by agencies within the Homeless Crisis Response System that are specifically contracted for these activities. During a hazardous weather event, shelter-in-place activities are activated to ensure that those unable to shelter inside have access to basic survival gear appropriate for the type of hazardous weather.

In a HWE status, weather conditions are forecasted to last 72-96 hours and consisting of any combination of the below criteria:

1. Below freezing temperatures
2. with or without precipitation or wind
3. an anticipated increase in people seeking shelter likely to exceed the contracted season shelter capacity -or-
4. an anticipated event of hazardous air quality due to wildfire smoke exceeding AQI between 81 and 150mcg -or-
5. flooding in areas occupied by unsheltered individuals and households -or-
6. extreme heat with HeatRisk score of 3

*Of note, homeless service agencies are not mandated or required to exceed standard operational activities beyond the regulatory occupancy capacity.*

Hazardous weather events will be declared by the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services (PHSS) Director in consultation with the Thurston County Health Officer following the recommendation of the agency and jurisdictional members of the Hazardous Weather Task Force (HWTF). The Thurston County PHSS Director will determine the appropriate start, duration and conclusion of the HWE. The HWTF will convene virtually or in person when planning or during a hazardous weather event as necessary to support successful implementation. The Hazardous Weather Task Force (HWTF) shall review hazardous weather event response effectiveness with the PHSS Director in a post-event debrief.

*Expanded supportive services during declared hazardous weather events are voluntary activities for agencies not otherwise contracted with the County for weather specific sheltering and outreach activities.*

### **Level 3: Emergency Level**

Emergency events are characterized by the same criteria used for HWE. Below freezing temperatures, possible precipitation, wind, extreme heat, flooding and wildfire smoke can all trigger a HWE response. However, the weather conditions, severity, intensity or duration beyond 96 hours or additional disasters (man-made or natural), are impacting a larger body of people than during a Seasonal (Level 1) or Hazardous Weather Event (Level 2) and there is a governmentally declared emergency. The Director of PHSS may activate Emergency Level status as noted above. The Director of PHSS shall coordinate any such action with the Thurston County Emergency Management Director. For this level, there is a separate level of authority, decision making, logistics/funding and communications. For instance, the Emergency Coordination Cell (ECC) located at Tilley Road is more likely to fully or partially operate for a single function, e.g., communications only, or all emergency management functions. Red Cross and FEMA are more likely to be involved.

### **Level 4: Deactivation**

Deactivation occurs when conditions triggering response subside and no longer pose a direct threat or as directed by Emergency Services. During this level volunteers are dismissed, data on response is collected and reported and shelters return to Level 1: Seasonal Response. The Hazardous Weather Task force convenes for a review of responding actions.

## **Weather Monitoring Strategies**

Partners in this plan have agreed to use the National Weather Service (NWS) (<https://www.weather.gov/>) to monitor weather conditions; Northwest River Forecast Center (NWRFC) (<https://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/rfc/>) to monitor flood risk; Washington's Air Monitoring Network (<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/enwiwa/>) to monitor air quality conditions; and NWS HeatRisk ([NWS HeatRisk \(noaa.gov\)](https://www.noaa.gov/heat-risk/)) to monitor heat risk. Office of Housing and Homeless Prevention staff, or HWTF designee will be responsible for ongoing weather monitoring to ensure partners are aware of potential weather triggers. Average overnight low temperatures are calculated based on nighttime temperatures in locations where homeless shelters operate. Wet weather conditions are determined by rainfall amounts, duration, and river levels in relation to flood stage. Thresholds for wet weather events are determined based on a combination of objective and subjective factors. Thresholds for dangerous heat temperatures are determined by utilizing the NWS HeatRisk calculation tool. Thresholds for dangerous air quality events are based on the Washington Air Quality Advisory (WAQA) Air Quality Index scale and will trigger an HWE when the Air Quality Index (AQI) measures between 80 -150 micrograms. Objective factors are concrete threshold triggers described in the following section. Subjective factors are extraordinary circumstances which are impactful to the unsheltered but not captured by other measures.

## HWE Threshold Triggers

Threshold triggers will be tracked and monitored throughout the calendar year. When weather predictions warrant, the Director will alert the designated lead staff and begin the consultation process. If the Director determines that conditions justify pre-activation, organizational participants will be notified. The Director with support from the HWTF will oversee preparation activities for the commencement of HWE. When HWE are anticipated, participating organizations will be notified, and press releases will be distributed. During an HWE, the Director will monitor conditions to observe when conditions predict a conclusion. Threshold triggers for the conclusion of HWE will use similar strategies as described in commencement.

### HWE Triggers

1. When conditions (i.e. strong winds, heavy precipitation, extended periods of cold, significant and prolonged snow accumulation, significant and prolonged ice accumulation, extreme and prolonged heat, dangerous and prolonged air quality event) are deemed by the Director of Public Health and Social Services to be severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of vulnerable Thurston County citizens.
2. When the participating predetermined agencies shelter capacity is anticipated to be exceeded at the designated sites, and the overflow of people is imminent.

## Analysis and Reporting

### Data Collection

Data Collection and Cost Reporting Spreadsheet will be used to track and report on services provided. Unless prohibited, homeless service providers are also required to collect client information which is input into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). HMIS data collected during Seasonal and HWE levels and will be used to understand bed utilization and program needs. Information collected via spreadsheet and HMIS can also be used to guide future updates of this Plan. Information will be collected on the fiscal and programmatic impact of Seasonal and HWE levels to help improve strategies. Service providers are asked to report on data points relating to the impact of expanding services. These items will include bed utilization, costs, supplemental offerings, and identified unmet needs.

### Communications Plan

The Thurston County and participating agency websites will provide information about services, volunteerism, and donation needs during Seasonal, HWE and Emergency levels. Many organizational websites can also link to current information and press releases, information, donations and volunteerism. Participating individuals are also asked to link to information posted on County websites via social media and organizational websites.

### Press Release

A press release will be prepared by OHHP staff and edited by the Thurston County PIO during pre-activation planning activities. The Thurston County Public Information Officer will publish the initial press release immediately prior to HWE commencement.

Press releases should be distributed to local newspapers, radio stations, and publicly posted on bulletin boards. Social media can inform the public of the need for volunteers, donations, and of increased

services. Facebook and Twitter accounts will be dedicated to informing the public information dissemination of HWE activities. Participating organizations can also link to their social media sites through links and use of hashtags.

### **Volunteerism**

Expanded service capacity and hours of operation at shelters throughout Thurston County raises the need for volunteers. Volunteers will be recruited, trained, and registered through the county staff or respective agencies. County staff will be a point of contact for prospective volunteers, providing referrals to participating organizations. Volunteers will be trained by service providers at sheltering sites or via Zoom to support expanded homeless shelter. Social media will be used to recruit and retain volunteers. Volunteer attendance and emergent needs of shelter providers will be tracked.

## Appendix 1: Key Partners/Organizational Roles

Name & Title	Role	Contact Info
<b>David Bayne</b> Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, Director of Public Health	County Hazardous Weather Authority	David.bayne@co.thurston.wa.us
<b>Dimyana Abdelmalek</b> Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, Health Director	County Hazardous Weather Authority	Dimyana.abdelmalek@co.thurston.wa.us
<b>Keylee Marineau</b> Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Dept., Homeless Response Program Manager	HWTF Coordinator	<a href="mailto:Keylee.marineau@co.thurston.wa.us">Keylee.marineau@co.thurston.wa.us</a> (360) 490-5910 (360) 867-2544
<b>Gabe Ash</b> Drexel House Men's Shelter	Shelter Site Contact	<a href="mailto:GabeA@ccsww.org">GabeA@ccsww.org</a>
<b>Meg Martin</b> Interfaith Works Executive Director	Shelter Site Contact	<a href="mailto:meg@iwshelter.org">meg@iwshelter.org</a> (360) 951-6767
<b>Kellie Patton St.</b> Michael's/Sacred Heart Winter Men's Shelter	Shelter Site Contact	kpatton@saintmichaelparish.org
<b>Skip Steffens</b> Union Gospel Mission, Director	Shelter Site Contact	skipsteffen@comcast.net
<b>Natalie Skovran</b> Family Support Center Deputy Director	Shelter Site Contact	<a href="mailto:natalies@fcss.org">natalies@fcss.org</a> (360) 754-9297, ext 218
<b>Liz Snyder</b> Community Youth Services, Rosie's Place Shelter Services Director	Shelter Site Contact	<a href="mailto:lzsnyder@communityyouthservices.org">lzsnyder@communityyouthservices.org</a> (360) 789-4919
<b>Kim Kondrat,</b> Homeless Response Coordinator	City of Olympia	<a href="mailto:kkondrat@ci.olympia.wa.us">kkondrat@ci.olympia.wa.us</a>
<b>Darian Lightfoot,</b> Housing Director	City of Olympia	<a href="mailto:dlightfo@ci.olympia.wa.us">dlightfo@ci.olympia.wa.us</a>
<b>Ryan Andrews,</b> Planning Manager	City of Lacey	<a href="mailto:Randrews@ci.lacey.wa.us">Randrews@ci.lacey.wa.us</a>

<b>Brad Medrud</b> , Long Range Planning Manager	City of Tumwater	<a href="mailto:BMedrud@ci.tumwater.wa.us">BMedrud@ci.tumwater.wa.us</a>
<b>NEEDS UPDATE</b> Partners in Prevention Education, Program Coordinator	Shelter-in-Place Outreach Coordinator	<a href="https://www.pipeolympia.org">@pipeolympia.org</a>
<b>Meghan Bergkamp</b> , Operations Director, Intercity Transit	Public Transportation Contact	<a href="mailto:EBergkamp@intercitytransit.com">EBergkamp@intercitytransit.com</a>

Partners highlighted in blue are contracted through the County for Hazardous Weather activities.

## Appendix 2: Emergency Preparedness – Phases of Activation

### Four Phases of Activation

- I. Level 1- Regular/Seasonal
  - a. Occurs year round, with increased bed capacity from November 1 through April 30
  - b. Contracting with shelters and outreach providers
  - c. Providing services within the community
  - d. Monitoring of the population in need
  - e. 72-hour weather monitoring
  - f. Bimonthly HWTF meetings
- II. Level 2 - Hazardous Weather Event
  - a. An expansion of homeless shelter services beyond seasonal services implemented when HWE triggers are met and with the declaration of the PHSS Director
  - b. Public information outreach efforts are increased
  - c. Commencement Press release issued
  - d. Increased homeless outreach
  - e. Activation of multijurisdictional facilities
- III. Level 3 - Operational Area Emergency (Response)
  - a. Level 3 will be activated based on the severity of the risk of extreme conditions to:  
vulnerable populations;
    - i. Unsheltered
    - ii. Sheltered, but without needed utilities;
    - iii. and the population in general
    - iv. Phase III can override or include directives associated with HWE actions of Phase II.
  - b. Level 3 actions are taken when conditions pose severe threat and one or more of the following exists:
    - i. Notification that one or more local jurisdictions have proclaimed an emergency related to extreme cold.
    - ii. National Weather Service extreme cold/freeze/flood/poor air warnings or wind chill warnings indicate weather conditions of extreme cold/freeze/flood/poor air conditions that endanger human life with credible weather forecasts of extremely cold/freeze/flood/poor air weather for more than three days.

- iii. These weather conditions include low daytime temperatures accompanied by night temperatures of 32 degrees Fahrenheit, or less.
- c. Level 3 actions include:
  - i. Coordinating calls will increase as needed.
  - ii. The Emergency Services director will advise the Governor on local activities and needs.
- IV. Level 4 - Deactivation (Recovery & Mitigation)
  - a. Level 4 – Deactivation (Recovery and Mitigation)
    - i. Deactivation occurs when conditions no longer pose threat or when directed by Emergency Services
    - ii. Coordinating among Operational Area partners (all phases).
  - iii. During the four phases of activation, specific actions within the Operational Area and local levels include:
    - a. Disseminating information (all phases).
    - b. Providing warming facilities (Phases II and III).
    - c. Directly contacting and monitoring those at risk (Level 2 and 3). o Demobilization triggers and procedures (Level 5).

## Appendix 3: Glossary of Terms

<b>Seasonal</b>	Area normal weather patterns specific to each season.
<b>Shelter in Place (SIP)</b>	For those who are unable to access shelter prior to or during the hazardous weather event, outreach workers provide survival supplies to those living outside to mitigate the harmful conditions while remaining in their current location.
<b>Conditional Use Permitting (CUP)</b>	A conditional use permit is governed by the local jurisdiction and dictates what use is considered appropriate or not for a site, even when zoning may deem a use appropriate.
<b>Vulnerable Populations</b>	Vulnerable population means persons or communities that are susceptible to reduced health, housing, financial or social stability outcomes because of current experience of or historical exposure to trauma, violence, poverty, isolation, bias, racism, stigma, discrimination, disability or chronic illness. Examples of vulnerable populations include, but are not limited to survivors of domestic violence; survivors of sexual assault; survivors of human trafficking, including labor trafficking and sex trafficking; survivors of commercial sexual exploitation; persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex; persons with a disability; African Americans and other persons of color who have been disproportionately impacted by policies and practices resulting in housing instability or housing insecurity; family caregivers for persons with a disability; immigrants and refugees; low-income residents of rural communities; persons living in poverty; persons at risk of or experiencing homelessness; youth involved in the child welfare system, including youth in the foster care system, and young adult alumni of the child welfare system; minors who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so; persons reentering society from criminal justice system involvement; and persons at risk of criminal justice system involvement due to disproportionate practices of enforcement, mental illness or substance use disorders.
<b>Air Quality Index (AQI)</b>	The US Air Quality Index is the Environmental Protection Agency’s index for reporting air quality. The higher the AQI value, the greater level of air pollution and the greater health concern.

<b>NWS HeatRisk</b>	A calculation tool that puts heat into actionable, impacts-based context and provides support in decision-making at the local level by taking into account local climatology, forecast, and impacts.
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## Appendix 4: Air Quality Index Graphic

Air Quality Index	Who Needs to be Concerned?	What Should I Do?
Good (0-50)	It's a great day to be active outside.	
Moderate (51-100)	Some people who may be unusually sensitive to particle pollution.	<p><b>Unusually sensitive people:</b> Consider reducing prolonged or heavy exertion. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. These are signs to take it easier.</p> <p><b>Everyone else:</b> It's a good day to be active outside.</p>
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101-150)	Sensitive groups include <b>people with heart or lung disease, older adults, children and teenagers.</b>	<p><b>Sensitive groups:</b> Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. It's OK to be active outside, but take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath.</p> <p><b>People with asthma</b> should follow their asthma action plans and keep quick relief medicine handy.</p> <p><b>If you have heart disease:</b> Symptoms such as palpitations, shortness of breath, or unusual fatigue may indicate a serious problem. If you have any of these, contact your health care provider.</p>
Unhealthy (151-200)	<b>Everyone</b>	<p><b>Sensitive groups:</b> Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling.</p> <p><b>Everyone else:</b> Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. Take more breaks during outdoor activities.</p>
Very Unhealthy (201-300)	<b>Everyone</b>	<p><b>Sensitive groups:</b> Avoid all physical activity outdoors. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when air quality is better.</p> <p><b>Everyone else:</b> Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling to a time when air quality is better.</p>
Hazardous (301-500)	<b>Everyone</b>	<p><b>Everyone:</b> Avoid all physical activity outdoors.</p> <p><b>Sensitive groups:</b> Remain indoors and keep activity levels low. Follow tips for keeping particle levels low indoors.</p>

## Appendix 5: NWS HeatRisk Graphic

Category	Level	Meaning	Response
Green	0	No Elevated Risk	None
Yellow	1	Low Risk for those extremely sensitive to heat, especially those without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration	None
Orange	2	Moderate Risk for those who are sensitive to heat, especially those without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration	Initiate early warning, public messaging, and response activities
Red	3	High Risk for much of the population, especially those who are heat sensitive and those without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration	Recommend activation of cooling centers and reduction in outdoor activities
Magenta	4	Very High Risk for entire population due to long duration heat, with little to no relief overnight	Recommend cancellation of outdoor events and activities