

## ESCAMBIA COUNTY FIRE-RESCUE

*Rules, Policies, and Guidelines*

**8100.015**

### **Extreme Weather**

Implemented: 04/18/22

Revised:

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Jason Catrambone, Fire Chief

#### **PURPOSE:**

To provide guidance to ECFR personnel encountering severe weather conditions. This guideline will cover preparation and operations before, during, and after severe weather events which are encountered on an infrequent to frequent basis. This includes prolonged rainstorms/flooding, thunderstorms/lightening, heat waves, tornados, and snow/ice storms.

#### **OBJECTIVE:**

To provide ECFR personnel with clear guidelines to follow during extreme weather events. Officers must consider a risk/benefit analysis during any operations in adverse or severe weather conditions and be prepared to alter, suspend, or terminate operations should conditions warrant.

#### **SCOPE:**

All Personnel

#### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

This plan is consistent with the Escambia County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP), the Florida Fire Chiefs' Association Statewide Emergency Response Plan (SERP), and the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

All personnel should be familiar with this plan and individuals with assigned responsibilities should be familiar with all the referenced plans contained herein.

#### **LEVELS OF OPERATION**

ECFR may operate at Preparedness Level I, II, or III during a predicted extreme weather event. Clear communication via radio, pagers, and County email shall notify all personnel at which level the department is currently operating.

#### **PREPAREDNESS LEVEL I**

ECFR shall always operate at level I. At Level I, all personnel should have a heightened awareness of a possible extreme weather event and keep informed on any weather predictions that have the potential to impact the local area.

Stores become crowded and supplies depleted as extreme weather conditions approach the area. Therefore, all personnel should have a pre-extreme weather plan and secure needed supplies for their families and property prior to staffing recalls. The emergency recall of personnel may prohibit them from securing essential supplies at the approach of extreme weather. Safety information and a list of suggested supplies and pre-storm measures can be obtained through Emergency Management.

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When an extreme weather event is forecast, the senior station officer or their designee shall ensure that all personnel prepare the station for the specific weather event such as the wrapping of pipes when freezing temperatures are predicted.

A formal review of the Extreme Weather Plan should be conducted at each station at the beginning of the appropriate season.

**PREPAREDNESS LEVEL II**

ECFR will operate at Level II anytime our local area is placed under an extreme weather watch, warning, or the EOC is activated.

The ESF 4/9/10 position may be staffed at the EOC and direct contact shall be available by phone (850)471-6588.

Additional EOC and support positions may be staffed as deemed necessary by the Fire Chief.

Personnel should make final home and family preparations and monitor weather information. In addition, personnel should be prepared for a possible personnel recall.

Depending on the type and severity of the event all pending leave for career personnel may be canceled unless approved by the Fire Chief or Deputy Chief.

ESF 4/9/10 will send periodic updates and situation reports via fax to all stations and email to all chief officers.

Initial preparations and checks shall be made at all fire stations and facilities to include personnel availability, apparatus, generators, fuel tank levels, and an inventory made of supplies and equipment.

Personnel will initiate preparations at the fire station preparing the facility for the extreme weather event.

**PREPAREDNESS LEVEL III**

ECFR will operate at Level III when our local area is predicted to sustain a direct impact or suffer major effects from an extreme weather event within 24 hours.

The incident command structure identified in this plan shall be initiated and positions staffed as ordered by the IC.

Weather information and bulletins will be disseminated to all personnel via email. If necessary, fire administration will schedule a weather briefing with chief officers.

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If necessary, a recall of all personnel shall be issued, and details given regarding reporting time and location.

All fire stations and facilities shall be prepared as appropriate for the situation and final preparations made regarding supplies and equipment.

### **PRE-EXTREME WEATHER OPERATIONS**

When ECFR moves into a Preparedness Level III condition, pre-extreme weather operations shall commence.

### **PERSONNEL**

Final preparations should have already been made with family members, personal vehicle filled with fuel, and personal property secured.

Due to the possibility of additional personnel occupying fire stations during extreme weather events, and the limited amount of living and sleeping areas, family members shall not use fire stations as a shelter location. This does not exclude two support members occupying the station who are actively involved in support functions.

Personnel should report to their assigned fire station or pre-designated location with the following recommended personal items:

- A change of clothes and footwear
- Ball cap or hat
- Insect repellent, lip balm, and sunscreen
- ID card
- Cash
- Spare glasses or contacts
- Prescription medication
- Towels and washcloths
- Sleeping bag, pillow, and bed linen
- Personal notepad and pens
- Personal hygiene supplies, including shower shoes
- Personal phone, pager, radio, and charging device
- Non-perishable food and snacks

Company officers shall notify their Battalion Chief/District Chief when their stations become staffed continuously. A pre-designated time to begin continuous staffing shall have been established in the chief officers' briefing.

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### FIRE STATION OPERATIONS

It is the responsibility of all personnel to properly organize and prepare their respective stations for extreme weather conditions and operations prior to the event when warnings are received. The designated senior officer shall report that the station preparations have been completed to the Battalion Chief/District Chief.

Senior officers shall designate certain personnel for communications duty at each station during continuous manning operations if necessary. Communications personnel shall act as the operator of the station radio, receive and send faxes, disseminate information to station personnel received from ESF 4/9/10, answer and direct telephone calls, utilize other communications devices that may be provided, and keep records pertaining to station response, damage to station and apparatus, and personnel. If residents contact the station to request shelter accommodations, refer them to the closest public shelter location. A list of these locations shall be forwarded to each station by ESF 4/9/10.

Should the County's primary communications system be inoperable, please refer to the Emergency Communications SOG.

**If any special purchases in excess of \$250 are made in preparation for extreme weather, and county funds will be sought for reimbursement, the purchase must be pre-approved by the Division Chief of Logistics and a tracking number may be assigned to the purchase.**

Loose objects and equipment outside of the station shall be secured and/or removed to the interior of the station if high winds or tornados are predicted.

Preparations shall be made to provide adequate sleeping and living areas for increased numbers of personnel.

Final checks on apparatus and operational supplies shall be made.

All water kegs and/or coolers shall be filled on apparatus.

All portable radios, spare batteries, defibrillator batteries, flashlights, pagers, suction units, cellular phones, and other electronic equipment shall be charged.

### **CHAPLAIN SERVICES & PEER Support**

The emotional and physical well being of fire department members is a major operational consideration following a weather related or other major disaster. Longer shifts and the effect of seeing widespread devastation both in the community and in the employees/members lives will have an impact on their state of mind. Rest, food, and rehydration, along with mental health support, is needed to help keep personnel working



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effectively during and after a disaster. Personnel should take advantage of ECFR's PEER Support Services and/or Chaplain Services by contacting a Chaplain directly, through their supervisor, or dispatch.

### **HAILSTORMS**

Hail may be encountered during both summer and winter storms with no warning

If operating in hail conditions, personnel shall wear full PPE including eye protection

Consideration must be given to providing adequate protection for patients and victims who may be exposed

It may become necessary to terminate response if hail conditions persist, the force of the hail combined with the speed of the apparatus or vehicle may cause the windshield to shatter. If necessary, the apparatus or vehicle shall pull safely off the roadway and face the vehicle towards the storm. Shelter under overpasses, awnings, etc should be utilized first.

Officer discretion shall be used to determine if personnel should seek shelter

### **FLOODING/PROLONGED RAIN/SWIFT WATER RESCUE**

Personnel safety

- PFDs shall be worn when in proximity (10') to:
  - A.** Water of unknown depth
  - B.** Water known to be over 3' in depth
  - C.** If water is moving and over 2' in depth, lifelines and other required safety equipment shall be utilized
- **Do not attempt swift water rescues unless properly trained and equipped**
- Avoid open manholes, runoffs, drainage ditches
- Use a pike-pole or roof hook to probe the ground in the direction of travel
- Walk in a straight line to avoid unseen ground hazards unless each member has a roof hook or pike-pole
- Wearing structural firefighting gear is strictly prohibited due to the drowning hazard
- Consider all water runoff to be contaminated
  - A.** Decontaminate all personnel and equipment that enter the water
- Apparatus Safety
  - A. Do Not** drive apparatus and/or staff vehicles through water of unknown depth
  - B. Do Not** drive apparatus and/or staff vehicles through moving water more than 2' in depth
  - C.** Consider that water depths can change rapidly
  - D.** If the depth of water is unknown, one crew member shall walk in front of the apparatus to determine depth utilizing a roof hook or pike pole



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Ensure all chain saws and ventilation saws are fueled and running

Personnel should monitor for downed lines and other sources of electrical hazards

### **LIGHTNING**

Storms accompanied by lightning are common during the summer months. A storm does not necessarily have to be severe to produce dangerous lightning. If thunder is audible, the potential for a lightning strike is present.

#### Safety Considerations

- Personnel not actively involved in emergency operations should remain inside apparatus during lightning events
- Aerial and ground ladders or any elevated operations (including roofs) should be halted during lightning conditions
- Personnel should avoid carrying or using long metallic tools
- Pump operators should seek shelter in a fully enclosed cab. If necessary to remain at pump panel, do not lean against apparatus and minimize contact with apparatus
- Personnel should avoid hilltops, open spaces, wire fences, metal clothes lines, exposed sheds and any elevated, electrically conductive objects
- For exposed personnel with no shelter, avoid the highest object in the area. If only isolated trees or other tall objects nearby, the best protection is to crouch in the open, keeping twice as far away from isolated tall objects as they are high

### **WIND**

Personnel operating in wind conditions of **sustained** 35 MPH will wear the following minimum PPE

- Helmet
- Bunker jacket or forestry jacket
- Eye protection

Use of aerial ladders should be discontinued in winds of **sustained** 35 MPH or greater

Response will be suspended if winds are **sustained** at 50 MPH

Ensure all chain saws are fueled and running

### **SEVERE WINTER WEATHER**

Personnel shall ensure that all apparatus, fuel cans and power equipment are fueled

Personnel shall ensure that the station generator is full of fuel and functioning

Secure lawn sprinkler system and drain



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Ensure all exposed water piping is wrapped and/or insulated as necessary

Service / Lines down calls – investigate only – Do not tie up resources on arcing or downed power lines and water problems. Units shall clear unless a fire or life safety hazard are present

Ensure all chain saws are fueled and running

Response will be reduced to single apparatus unless caller information or the officer determines additional resources are needed

Ensure that truck bay doors remained closed to prevent freezing of ice machines and water spickets

If ambient temperatures are freezing or below the pump shall be drained before being exposed to the outside temperatures.

Extreme cold is an additional stressor for personnel and equipment. The strategy of more frequent crew rotations and, in this case, a heated rehabilitation area, is needed. Fires that might be handled with a single alarm may need additional companies to provide more crews to minimize the potential for cold-related injuries.

- If the ambient temperature falls below freezing additional companies shall be dispatched as determined by the OIC. Dispatch may automatically add an additional company if caller information or numerous 911 calls indicate a working structure fire

**SEVERE SUMMER WEATHER (SEVERE T-STORM, TORNADO WATCHES/WARNINGS)**

Additional staffing or special actions are not always required for severe thunderstorm watches and warnings however, escalated threats may warrant additional staffing and staging of specialized equipment and/or apparatus.

Personnel should monitor the weather closely

Ensure chain saws and ventilation saws are fueled and running

Tornado watches require no special actions other than monitoring weather conditions

Tornado warnings (May have very little advance warning)

- All personnel should closely monitor weather conditions especially in the immediate area, report all funnel clouds to dispatch with location and direction of travel
- If time permits turn all apparatus around backwards so that the windshield is facing the interior of the truck bay



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### **FOG**

Fog is of concern mainly due to limited visibility during response to an incident scene, although sometimes heavy fog can contribute to slick road conditions. Apparatus operators should remember that emergency lights and apparatus will be less visible to other drivers and should use due caution regarding both limited visibility and slick roadways, remembering that other drivers may present a greater than normal hazard to responding apparatus during fog conditions. Heavy fog which restricts visibility may also present a safety hazard when during aerial operations around overhead wires or objects.

Apparatus and vehicles shall utilize headlights when driving in foggy conditions.

Extra precautions should be utilized when working an incident in foggy conditions. Precautions such as but not limited to road flares, law enforcement, road rangers, extra reflective clothing, etc.

### **EXTREME HEAT AND DROUGHT**

Extreme heat is an additional stressor for personnel and equipment. The same strategies of more frequent crew rotations and, in this case, an air-conditioned rehabilitation area, are needed. Fires that might be handled with a single alarm may need additional companies to provide more crews to minimize the potential for heat-related injuries.

- If the ambient temperature reaches 95 degrees or higher with heat indexes greater than 100 degrees additional companies shall be dispatched as determined by the OIC. Dispatch may automatically add an additional company if caller information or numerous 911 calls indicate a working structure fire

Droughts generally will reduce community water supplies. Provisions for additional water supply may be needed. These provisions may include acquiring additional tankers and utilizing large diameter supply hose to supplement the existing water distribution system shortfalls.

The potential for fast spreading wildfires exists during these times of drought, additional resources should be considered especially when an urban interface situation is present or predicted.

Depending on the drought index and other factors, the Fire Chief may issue a burn ban during drought conditions or conditions favorable for wildfires.

Personnel shall exercise extreme caution and ensure they are hydrating properly during these times. Hydration begins before reporting for duty.





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## **EARTHQUAKES AND EARTHQUAKE RELATED TSUNAMIS**

Pensacola and other parts of extreme northwestern Florida are part of an area known as the Wiggins uplift; a fault centered in Mississippi that includes southern Alabama. The fault has been active within the past 150 years and extends into the Gulf of Mexico, according to a Geological Survey chart. Escambia County is considered a zone "0" meaning it is highly unlikely this area would encounter a substantial earthquake.

If the area was affected by an earthquake or tremors, they can cause structural damage to buildings, power and water distribution, pipeline systems, and the infrastructure in general. Fire department properties are not exempt from potential damage. The damage from earthquakes can include.

- Damage to buildings
- Damage to roadways and other infrastructure, e.g., power plants, water systems, rail systems, etc
- Fires from ruptured gas lines, downed wires, and collapsed structures
- The release of hazardous materials
- Multiple rescues of victims who were occupying damaged buildings
- Potential for mass casualties and mass fatalities

Should Escambia County encounter an earthquake, ECFR personnel should first check its resources to determine damage to structures and/or equipment reporting this damage to the Battalion Chief/District Chief who will communicate it to the EOC once activated.

Each station and/or company shall conduct a PAR and report to the on-duty Battalion Chief ASAP. Once the EOC is operational personnel shall report this information to the EOC rep as well as available staffing.

Following a PAR, companies should perform a drive through and damage assessment of their first due area. Companies will not respond to emergencies until this survey is completed, rather than committing to the first emergency they encounter. There may be more serious emergencies requiring greater priority.

Depending on the magnitude of the earthquake or tremor, ECFR operations may continue for extended periods.

ECFR "Special Operations" as well as outside US&R teams may deploy

## **SUDDEN GROUND SUBSIDENCE / EROSION /SINKHOLES**

Sinkholes are natural depressions in the ground that sometimes occur when soil, rock, or other surface materials dissolve into underlying water, and they can appear gradually or very suddenly. Damage caused by sinkholes may not be covered in all homeowner policies. Homeowners should be directed to contact their insurance carrier for more

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information and to determine their policy limits.

The Florida panhandle region consists of deeply buried carbonate rocks. Overburden sediments are primarily cohesive clayey sands and interbedded carbonates in excess of 200 feet thick. Sinkholes are uncommon, but rare deep collapse types and small subsidence sinkholes formed in shallow shell beds or carbonate lenses are possible. According to the Director of Escambia County Community & Environmental Department it is very unlikely that Escambia County will encounter a sinkhole. Most likely it will be the result of manmade engineering/infrastructure failures

Fire department personnel shall approach the area with caution. If any part of a structure has sustained damage fire department personnel will not make entry until Special Operations has arrived on-scene

Fire department personnel should establish a safe zone and cordon off the area restricting access

If it is thought to be an actual sinkhole notification should be made to Escambia County Emergency Management

Here are some immediate steps the property owner should take if a sinkhole has appeared on your property, or if a portion of your home has shifted or sunk due to ground cover collapse:

- Provide for the personal safety of your family. Evacuate, if necessary.
- Secure or remove your valuable possessions, if you can do so safely.
- Notify your insurance company or agent.
- Notify your city or county building inspection department.
- Mark the sinkhole or property with fencing, rope or tape to warn others of the danger.