

NATIONAL AMBULANCE SERVICE



Severe Weather Response Plan

Document Control

Plan Version	Pages	Issued to	Date of Amendment	Author
Draft 1.0	All	NAS Leadership Team	14 th December 2010	RM
Draft 1.1	All	NAS Leadership Team	9 th September 2011	RM

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Severe Weather Plans are one form of Emergency Plan that can be activated in preparation for a major emergency as well as in response and recovery.
- 1.2 This plan deals with the National Ambulance Service response to severe weather. Severe weather could be Heavy Rainfall, Gales, Heavy Snowfall, Ice and Flooding.
- 1.3 Support may also be required for vulnerable sections of the community.
- 1.4 Not all severe weather events will be major emergencies, but the principles and arrangements for co-ordinated response to major emergencies should inform all response to severe weather events.

2.0 WEATHER WARNINGS

- 2.1 Arrangements are in place with Met Éireann to issue public service severe weather warnings through the media and also on www.met.ie.
- 2.2 The target time for the issuing of a warning is 24 hours before the start of the event, but a warning may be issued up to 48 hours in advance when confidence is high.
- 2.3 Severe Weather Warnings are designed to warn communities of severe hazardous weather, with the potential to cause widespread disruption to communications, transport difficulties and threat to lives, welfare and property.

3.0 GOAL

- 3.1 The primary goal of this Severe Weather Response Plan is to provide procedural guidance to all staff in the event of severe weather that may compromise normal service delivery.
- 3.2 Should any Extreme of Weather have the potential to, or cause severe disruption to the provision of core services, reference should be made to the National Ambulance Service Business Continuity Plan – Staff Action Cards.

4.0 OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 To ensure activation at the appropriate level within the National Ambulance Service at the initial stages of severe weather incidents.
- 4.2 To ensure appropriate leadership and direction is available to direct the utilisation of resources
- 4.3 To ensure co-ordinated management of any severe weather incident.
- 4.4 To ensure a co-ordinated approach with partners, where required, during a severe weather incident.
- 4.5 To ensure continuity of normal emergency services
- 4.6 To establish and maintain robust arrangements to offset the negative affect on service delivery
- 4.7 To aid and monitor the provision of support to other agencies
- 4.8 To co-ordinate requests to Voluntary Emergency Services and the Defence Forces

5.0 SCOPE

- 5.1 This plan is guided and directed by the Framework for Major Emergency Management, Appendices, Guidance and Protocol documents, existing National Ambulance Service Plans, Staff Action Cards and training for key personnel.
- 5.2 This document should be read in conjunction with and in the context of the NEMO Guidance Document - Special Transport Arrangements during Severe Weather Emergencies (see Appendix I)

6.0 MITIGATING FACTORS - STAFF AVAILABILITY

- 6.1 This plan is based on the premise that the majority of key personnel in the National Ambulance Service will be available in the event of severe weather.
- 6.2 In the event that insufficient numbers of key personnel are available, the most senior grade responding or on duty will take charge and/or delegate responsibility to implement this plan to an appropriate senior person.

7.0 STAFF SAFETY

- 7.1 It is essential that any member of staff designated, requested or assigned to respond to the scene of an incident should do so in a manner that is consistent with maintaining their own safety in the first instance.
- 7.2 The maintenance of the Safety, Health and Welfare of all staff charged with responding during adverse road conditions must be exercised, monitored and maintained throughout. It is essential that all staff exercise their respective responsibilities in maintaining safety standards and monitoring colleagues for signs and symptoms of physical or psychological stress.

8.0 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RESOURCES

SITUATION REPORTS AND GUIDANCE

Emergency Response Coordination Centre

HSE Regional Crisis Management Teams

National and Area Emergency Management Offices

WEATHER

www.met.ie

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

www.aaroadwatch.ie www.nra.ie www.rsa.ie

Local Authority websites

NEWS ALERTS

www.rte.ie www.breakingnews.ie

9.0 REVIEW

- 9.1 This plan shall remain under constant review to enable required changes as the need arises.

10.0 BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

ACTION CARD 1

AMBULANCE CONTROL (CONTROL SUPERVISOR ON DUTY)

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of impending severe weather, Ambulance Control will monitor **“Severe Weather Warnings”** from www.met.ie outlining the expected type of weather, e.g. Snow, Ice, etc.

If the content of the **“Severe Weather Warning”** is expected to hamper the delivery of services, carry out the following actions:

- Notify each NAS Officer
- Forward Meteorological Office fax to each Ambulance Station
- Notify all staff by Cascade Method in place
- Contact Civil Defence, Defence Forces and Voluntary Agencies to establish availability of Four Wheel Drive vehicles and other resources
- Contact relevant Stations to establish staff availability to operate Four Wheel Drive vehicles where available as support to Emergency Ambulances
- Notify all callers of possible delays, depending on road conditions and resource availability and ensure that this is recorded.
- **MAINTAIN AN ELECTRONIC LOG OF ALL ACTIONS TAKEN**
- The decision to retain Operational or Control staff on duty, or request additional resources, will be taken in consideration of the following circumstances:
 - Consultation with the most Senior Manager available (during out of hours, a Control Supervisor may be the most senior grade on duty)
 - Current service demand levels
 - Predicted geographical area affected
 - Time of day the severe weather (or flooding) is expected

ACTION CARD 2

AMBULANCE CONTROL (CONTROL SUPERVISOR ON DUTY)

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

- Contact all Paramedic Supervisors at Stations where 4 x 4 vehicles are based to ascertain operational readiness. Request Paramedic Supervisors to confirm back to Ambulance Control state of readiness
- In each geographic area an Area Co-ordinator/Manager may be nominated to co-ordinate all requests for special transport assistance and advised to the National Ambulance Service through the Regional Crisis Management Team. It is envisaged that a Local Co-ordination Manager will be appointed for each of the following areas: South East, South, Mid West, Midlands, West, North West, Dublin North East and Dublin, south of the Liffey, with Wicklow and Kildare.
- All requests from various HSE services for special transport assistance should be directed in the first instance to the relevant line manager who will verify, validate and prioritise the requests, before passing them to the nominated Area Co-ordination Manager. The Area Co-ordination Manager will co-ordinate and prioritise all requests and pass them to Ambulance Control.
- Where such requests are received, arrange dispatch of 4x4 resources on a priority basis as advised by the nominated Area Co-ordination Manager. Depending on volume, it may be appropriate to route this activity through a combined Voluntary Emergency Services Control Centre where and when established
- Where additional staff attendance is required, assign staff member(s) to man a Contingency Workstation. All calls in relation to this issue should then be routed to this desk. Where a separate contact number is in use, this should be provided to the Regional Crisis Management Team at the first opportunity.
- Update Control Managers on a regular basis
- Monitor www.met.ie and www.aaroadwatch.ie for further updates
- Any other assigned duty

ACTION CARD 3

CONTROL MANAGERS (OR DESIGNATED ALTERNATES)

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of receipt of a “**Severe Weather Alert**” from Ambulance Control, contact Control to establish the nature of the problem and ensure that all appropriate actions are underway:

- Alert/Notification Procedure (all Stations and hospitals, etc.)
- Liaise with Senior Manager to discuss the need for additional manpower – Contingency Workstations
- Ensure the provision of normal emergency services are available
- Ensure a log of all untoward events is maintained

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- Contact the Emergency Management Office to discuss or request the need for standby or activation of Defence Force resources. Confirm contact arrangements with nominated PDF Liaison Officer
- Directors of Public Health Nursing may contact Ambulance Control to indicate possible demand for and arrangements for requesting 4x4 vehicles. These requests should subsequently be re-directed and bundled through a single nominated Area Coordination Manager with the Integrated Service Area
- Brief Control Supervisors on updates or amendments as necessary
- Update Senior Manager at regular intervals
- Liaise with other Officers as required
- Monitor Control staff attendance and wellbeing
- Any other assigned duty
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND DECISIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

ACTION CARD 4

PARAMEDIC SUPERVISORS (AS AVAILABLE)

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of receipt of a **“Severe Weather Alert”** from Ambulance Control, carry out the following actions:

- Notify all Paramedics/Advanced Paramedics to exercise extreme caution (subject to timing of conditions) and reiterate requirement for PPE
- Check and secure operational readiness of 4x4 or any specialist vehicles on Station
- Review the availability of a set of snow socks (where issued) to guarantee mobility of at least 1 ambulance.
- Contact Control Supervisor on Duty and advise state of readiness and resource availability

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- Contact Operations Resource Manager (or Control Supervisor out of hours) to discuss requirement/need for staff to operate 4x4 vehicles
- Monitor staff attendance and wellbeing
- Any other assigned duty
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND DECISIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

ACTION CARD 5

OPERATIONAL SUPPORT AND RESILIENCE MANAGERS (OR DESIGNATED ALTERNATES)

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of receipt of a “**Severe Weather Alert**” from Ambulance Control, contact Control to establish the nature of the problem and confirm that all appropriate actions are underway:

- Confirm all Control and key Officer actions are underway
- Liaise with Area counterparts to assess national impact
- Contact and Brief Area Operations Manager on state of readiness and any adverse events
- Consult Service Officers and determine the need to request assistance from Voluntary Emergency Services and/or the Defence Forces.
- Confirm all Service Officers are familiar with current situation
- Ensure availability of recovery services (including out of hours) and fuel supplies from the contracted providers.

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- Make a recommendation to the Area Operations Manager regarding the continuance of routine patient transport services
- Consider the necessity to channel a request to other agencies, via the RCMT, i.e. Local Authorities for specific Road clearing/gritting etc., Garda Siochana for 4x4 vehicles
- Update Area Operations Manager at regular intervals
- Supervise and support Officers as required
- Monitor Officer attendance and wellbeing
- Any other assigned duty
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND DECISIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

ACTION CARD 6

AREA OPERATIONS MANAGER (OR DESIGNATED ALTERNATE)

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of receipt of a "**Severe Weather Alert**" from Ambulance Control, contact Control to establish the nature of the problem and confirm that all appropriate actions are underway:

- Initiate NAS National or Area Severe Weather Group and schedule teleconference. Agenda to include:
 - Schedule of Teleconferences
 - Establish Area wide Incident List (Report all weather related incidents concerning ambulance operations)
 - Review relevant incidents
 - Agree corrective actions to be adopted if applicable
 - Review Task Sheet
- Confirm state of readiness and any adverse events with Operational Support and Resilience Manager
- Confirm all Service Officers are familiar with current situation and roles
- Where deemed necessary, authorise the use of additional manpower/overtime working
- Where deemed necessary, authorise the request for assistance Voluntary Emergency Services
- Where deemed necessary, authorise the request for assistance from the Defence Forces

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- Assess the necessity to continue routine patient transport services
- Participate in Regional Crisis Management Team teleconferences
- Liaise with other Service Managers/Heads of Service/Communications Manager as required

- Update Director at regular intervals
- Supervise and support OSRM as required
- Consider the necessity to channel a request to other agencies, via the RCMT, i.e. Local Authorities for specific Road clearing/gritting etc., Garda Siochana for 4x4 vehicles
- Consider the need to set up a joint Control Centre allowing one point of contact for the NAS via Ambulance Control for resource utilisation and informing NAS on the clinical skill mix available.
- Where such a request is to be made, it must be channelled through the RCMT for action by the relevant Area Emergency Management Office who will be responsible for contacting each of the Voluntary Emergency Services and Civil Defence regarding same
- Consider approving the contacting of all hospitals to prioritise all transfers and inform them that transfers may be completed by Voluntary Emergency Services subject to appropriate clinical level of training.
- Where such a request is to be made, it must be channelled through the RCMT for action by the appropriate line management structure in each Area
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND DECISIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

ACTION CARD 7

OPERATIONS RESOURCE MANAGERS

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of receipt of a “**Severe Weather Alert**” from Ambulance Control, contact Control to establish the nature of the problem and initiate all appropriate actions as follows:

- Consult Paramedic Supervisors and confirm state of readiness
- Confirm all Paramedics/Advanced Paramedics have been advised to exercise extreme caution (subject to timing of conditions)
- Establish the mobility of ambulances, 4x4 and specialist assets at each location and liaise with Fleet, Logistics and Estate Manager as appropriate
- Liaise with other services/agencies to establish the nature and extent of road conditions
- Monitor the safety and welfare of all staff
- Delegation of appropriate tasks to all available Paramedic Supervisors
- Provide status report to Senior Manager

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- Contact Control Managers and other Officers and act on issues requiring attention
- Update Senior Manager at regular intervals
- Monitor Operational staff attendance and wellbeing
- Any other assigned duty
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND DECISIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

ACTION CARD 8

FLEET, LOGISTICS AND ESTATE MANAGERS

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of receipt of a “**Severe Weather Alert**” from Ambulance Control, contact Control to establish the nature of the problem and initiate all appropriate actions as follows:

- Contact Operational Support and Resilience Manager (or designated alternate) for specific tasking.
- Establish the mobility of ambulances, 4x4 and specialist assets at each location
- Liaise with other services/agencies to establish the nature and extent of road conditions
- Provide status report to Senior Manager
- Ensure availability of recovery services (including out of hours) and fuel supplies from the contracted providers.

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- Contact Control Managers and other Officers and act on issues requiring attention
- Update Senior Manager at regular intervals
- Arrange additional 4x4 vehicles from local dealers where deemed necessary
- Any other assigned duty
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND DECISIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

ACTION CARD 9

PARAMEDICS/ADVANCED PARAMEDICS

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of receipt of a “**Severe Weather Alert**” from Ambulance Control and in the absence of a Paramedic Supervisor on Station, carry out the following actions:

- Exercise extreme caution (subject to timing of conditions)
- Check and secure operational readiness of 4x4 or any specialist vehicles on Station
- Review the availability of a set of snow socks (where issued) to guarantee mobility of at least 1 ambulance.
- Contact Control Supervisor on Duty and advise state of readiness and resource availability

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- Contact Operations Resource Manager (or Control Supervisor out of hours) to discuss requirement/need for staff to operate 4x4 vehicles
- Monitor staff attendance and wellbeing
- Any other assigned duty
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND DECISIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

ACTION CARD 10

EDUCATION AND COMPETENCY ASSURANCE TEAM

INITIAL ACTIONS - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

In the event of receipt of a **“Severe Weather Alert”** from Ambulance Control, contact Control to establish the nature of the problem and initiate the following actions:

- Contact Control Managers and confirm that contact has been made with Voluntary Emergency Services. Act as liaison with all Voluntary Emergency Services to determine availability and mobility timeframes
- Be prepared to provide Advanced Paramedic support to crews responding to emergencies in difficult locations
- Contact Senior Manager to confirm availability and for assignment

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- Consult with other Officers and act on issues requiring attention
- Assist other Ambulance Officers
- Update Senior Manager at regular intervals
- Any other assigned duty
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND DECISIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

ACTION CARD 11

BUSINESS SUPPORT STAFF (OR DESIGNATED ALTERNATE)

ACTIONS (WHERE ACTIVATED BY SENIOR MANAGER) - RETRIEVE ACTION CARD

- Contact Senior Manager for assignments
- Contact each Local Authority and ascertain what measures are being taken to keep road infrastructure open
- Contact Garda Traffic Corps to ascertain road conditions throughout the Area
- Monitor www.met.ie and www.aaroadwatch.ie for updates
- Prepare daily brief on road conditions
- Check all key contacts and ensure all email addresses and phone numbers are correct
- Collate all logs, actions and decisions and prepare a single chronological report for daily update and circulation
- Manage all logging requirements as directed by decision makers during the incident
- Carry out duties as directed by the Senior Manager
- **MAINTAIN A LOG OF ALL CONTACTS AND ACTIONS (INCLUDE TIMES AND DATES)**

NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFICE – GUIDANCE

SPECIAL TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE TO THE HSE DURING SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCIES – ARRANGEMENTS

1. Background

During recent periods of severe weather, special transport arrangements were put in place to support the HSE in the delivery of critical services. This document is intended to formalise these arrangements for future severe weather emergencies.

Transport assistance was provided to the HSE by a number of organisations including the Defence Forces, the Coast Guard, the Red Cross, the Order of Malta, the St John Ambulance Brigade and the Civil Defence Service.

This assistance included both 4 x 4 ambulances and standard 4 x 4 vehicles.

2. Activation and Stand-Down of these Arrangements

Where severe weather is threatened, or has arrived, the HSE Crisis Management Teams in the affected areas should meet by teleconference, review the situation, and take the decision to activate these arrangements, when appropriate. Alternatively, the Regional Director of Operations may take the decision to activate these arrangements.

Once this decision is taken it should be communicated to local Ambulance Control, the Chief Emergency Management Officer, the Area Co-ordination Manager (see below) and all key services in the area.

While the severe weather emergency continues, the provision of special transport assistance should be monitored by the local HSE CMT. Once it is no longer required, a decision to suspend these special arrangements should be made by either the local CMT or the Regional Director of Operations and that decision should be communicated to the local Ambulance Control, the Chief Emergency Management Officer, the Area Co-ordination Manager and all the relevant local services.

3. The Process

In each geographic area an Area Co-ordinator/Manager (typically at General Manager level) should be nominated to co-ordinate all requests for special transport assistance. As far as possible, these individuals (and their alternates) should be nominated in advance, so that they will be in a position to become active and effective in the shortest possible time.

Note: It is envisaged that a Local Co-ordination Manager will be appointed for each of the following areas: South East, South, Mid West, Midlands, West, North West, Dublin North East and Dublin, south of the Liffey, with Wicklow and Kildare.

All requests for special transport assistance should be directed in the first instance to the relevant line manager who will verify, validate and prioritise the requests, before passing them to the nominated Area Co-ordination Manager. The Area Co-ordination Manager will co-ordinate and prioritise all requests and pass them to Local Ambulance Control.

Ambulance Control will pass the requests to the appropriate service depending on:

- The resources required to complete the task
- The resources available, with the skills and competencies necessary to undertake the task safely, and
- Local geographic considerations.

4. Prioritising Services for Support

During most severe weather emergencies it will not be possible to provide transport assistance to every HSE service which requires it and, therefore, a key element of the successful organisation of this process is the prioritising of the tasks for which assistance will be provided.

The aim of this prioritisation is to achieve the most effective utilisation, for the benefit of patients, clients and staff, of an extremely rare resource, at a time of major demand. In this regard, it is important that all alternative options to support the relevant service are considered before a request is made for emergency transport assistance.

Priorities should be considered in terms of threats to the life, health and welfare of patients, clients and staff. Consideration should also be given to supporting services, such as out of hours GP Co-ops, in the absence of which there will be increased work load on the other HSE services, such as hospital Emergency Departments.

Among the priority tasks are the transport of:

- Trauma patients
- Urgent maternity patients
- Clinical staff for urgent home visits (Palliative Care, Oncology, etc)
- Patients between hospitals, to Out Patients, home from hospital, etc, where this is urgent
- Urgent test samples, blood, etc.
- Out of hours GP Co-op staff
- Key staff from home to health facilities

5. Miscellaneous

In the operation of these emergency transport assistance arrangements during severe weather, it is important to remember that:

- This service should be used for real emergencies only. If something can wait 24 hours, it is not an emergency now
- Transport will normally be on a “one way” only basis, with the exception of urgent home visits
- Transporting staff to work is not the highest priority but, where it does happen, staff members will not be picked up from home but will be expected to make their way to some local well known spot, such as a Garda Station or Church, where a group may be collected.
- Staff who live in an urban area will not normally be transported to work