

# Severe weather response plan: No one in need will be turned away



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## Commitment: No one in need of shelter will be turned away

No matter how many days of severe weather we might see, the Joint Office of Homeless Services and Multnomah County's and Portland's emergency management officials share a **detailed rapid-response plan that scales up** to provide the needed response.

The plan is centered on a basic commitment: **No one who needs a warm, dry place will be turned away.**



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## How we prepare for severe weather

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- Work on this winter's plan started even before last winter left us. That includes **months of coordination and planning meetings with every partner** who touches the response.
- As cold weather approached, we worked to **distill the evolving plan and share it publicly, proactively**, through a press conference.
- We opened and shared word about our **seasonal shelters**.



## Fitting in with our day-to-day work

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- All year, the Joint Office works with providers to connect neighbors to **shelter, housing and prevention services**.
- **Thousands more people accessed those services** over the past three years, but the number of people counted as homeless has nonetheless risen from 3,807 to 4,177.
- The **lack of affordable housing** means the number of people who need help in severe weather is increasing.



## Key change in preparations: Earlier call for volunteers, donations

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- The Joint Office has created a **FAQ for 211info.org** inviting neighbors to volunteer at warming centers and donate winter gear.
- The FAQ links to **Transition Projects' volunteer signup page**. It also gives a **detailed list of gear**, and an Amazon wish list, with **drop-off locations at JOIN and Transition Projects**.
- **Having the right gear in the right places** before a crisis will help providers better focus services and life-saving work in the moment.



## Thresholds: When does the plan first take effect?

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The criteria for declaring a severe weather event have changed slightly this year. Now, they're the following:

- Temperatures forecast at 25°F or below
- Forecasts predict at least an inch of snow in most areas
- Overnight temperatures forecast at 32°F or below, with at least an inch of driving rain
- Other conditions, including severe wind chills or extreme temperature fluctuations



## When the plan takes effect

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- The Joint Office monitors forecasts for **downtown Portland (97204)**, **PDX (97218)** and **Troutdale (97060)**. If any meet thresholds, the Joint Office notifies **Multnomah County communications** and **211info**, which alerts service providers, first responders and community members.
- The alerts show available night and day shelters, alongside details on transportation. On days that fall short of emergency thresholds, the Joint Office may still send alerts.



## Level 1 response: Three days or less of severe weather

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- The Joint Office's contracted severe weather shelter provider, **Transition Projects**, initially opens one or more shelters, with hundreds of beds at the ready.
- Locations include **Imago Dei** in southeast Portland, **Bud Clark Commons** in downtown Portland, and the **Sunrise Center** in Gresham. Shelters are low-barrier, with space for carts and bikes, and access for pets. Community partners may also open spaces if needed.



## Level 1 response: Three days or less of severe weather

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- The Joint Office works with 211Info, TriMet, outreach providers, first responders and taxi companies to **coordinate transportation of people and supplies to warming centers**, and to distribute cold weather gear.
- Trained volunteers fill shifts at warming centers as needed.
- **211 is the information hub** for shelter, transportation, gear and volunteers.
- The Joint Office **convenes a daily call** to monitor shelter capacity and assist in logistics coordination.



## Level 2 response: Four days or more of severe weather

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- The response **grows to a 24-hour operation**, both for the Joint Office and 211. Multnomah County's **emergency management department assigns a liaison** to support the response.
- All **Level 1 responses continue**, including ongoing expansion of shelter capacity as needed.



## Level 3 response: Extreme and/or extended severe weather

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- All **Level 1 and Level 2 responses remain in effect.**
- Emergency management officials **assist in coordinating transportation resources** to ensure vulnerable neighbors continue to be moved to shelter; staff and volunteers reach warming centers; warming center supplies are delivered in timely fashion; and cold weather gear can get to anyone still refusing shelter.



## Level 3 response: Extreme and/or extended severe weather

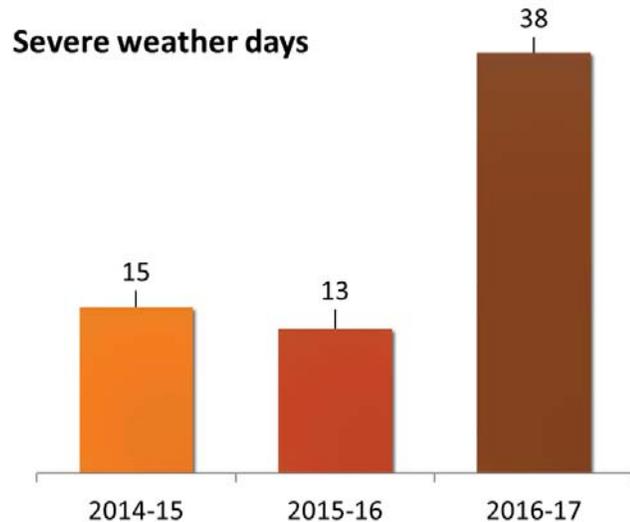
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- As more shelter capacity is needed, emergency management uses its resources to support all aspects of managing that expansion. **Public buildings may open.**
- **Government workers are enlisted** to expand the response and relieve volunteers/staffers working for days.
- Because it can be challenging to move people from nighttime warming centers to day spaces and back, **certain nighttime warming centers may remain open in the day.**



## Context: Last year's unprecedented need

- Overall, severe weather protocols were active for **roughly 40 days** last season.
- A typical season, from November 1 to March 31, sees **10 to 20 days**.



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## Context: Last year's response

- Last winter, we provided more than **13,000 shelter bed nights**. On the most used night, **January 15**, the community provided shelter space for nearly **750 people**.
- We mobilized **unprecedented outreach and transportation support**.
- **The conversation changed:** People understood this was an all-hands moment. That engagement helped shift our conversation on homelessness from divisiveness to a **shared responsibility** for helping neighbors.



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