



JOINT OFFICE OF HOMELESS SERVICES

No one will be turned away: Preparing our response for severe winter weather

For the hundreds of neighbors in Multnomah County living without shelter, even just a single day or night of severe winter weather – including high winds, and snow, sleet and ice – is **a life-threatening event that requires an emergency response**. The danger grows as conditions linger.

That's why, no matter how many days of severe weather we might see, the Joint Office of Homeless Services has a rapid-response plan – just as it did last year – that can scale up to provide the necessary response. The plan is centered on a fundamental commitment: **No one who needs a warm, dry and safe place during severe weather will ever be turned away.**

On the busiest night during last year's crisis, outreach providers and first responders worked with the Joint Office to help nearly 750 people escape the cold, with room to spare. Those crisis spaces are in addition to the more than 1,500 year-round and winter beds already in our community.

The Joint Office works closely with service providers as well as first responders and emergency management departments from Multnomah County, Portland and Gresham. It also relies on the support of community groups, residents and other government agencies.

WHEN THE PLAN TAKES EFFECT

The Joint Office declares a severe weather event whenever any of the following conditions are met:

- 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

The Joint Office continuously monitors National Weather Service forecasts for downtown Portland (97204), Portland International Airport (97218) and Troutdale (97060). If any meet the thresholds for severe weather, the Joint Office notifies Multnomah County's communications office and 211info, which alerts service providers, first responders and community members who've requested notice.

The alerts list available night and day shelters, alongside details on transportation. On days that fall just short of the thresholds for emergency response, the Joint Office may still send alerts about available services.

HOW THE RESPONSE WORKS

The response builds in orchestrated ways, depending on the severity of conditions, how long they're expected to last, and where they're occurring. Severity levels can escalate quickly if conditions change.

First-level response: Three days or less of severe weather

- The Joint Office's severe weather shelter provider, Transition Projects, opens one or more shelters, with 150 to 300 beds total, after receiving notice. Locations include Imago Dei in

east Portland and the Bud Clark Commons in downtown Portland. Shelters must be low-barrier, with toilets, space for carts and bikes, and access for pets.

- The Joint Office works with voluntary providers and government partners to incrementally open additional space as needed, if capacity tightens.
- Union Gospel Mission provides a warm, dry staging area downtown for those who need transportation to an emergency shelter. They supply Trimet vouchers as needed.
- 211 serves as an information hub on for information on shelter availability, transportation, donations and volunteer needs. The Joint Office convenes a daily call of first responders, outreach providers and shelter providers.

Second-level response: Four or more consecutive days of severe weather

- 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.
- The Joint Office arranges transportation for outreach workers and to deliver people in need to emergency shelter, relying first on Trimet but also working with outreach agencies and first responders as needed. 211 dispatches outreach agencies and first responders who help with that work. Taxis are also made available for neighbors as needed.

Third-level response: Extended severe weather, plus transportation challenges

- Additional space is sought in government buildings and at expansion sites that can muster space for emergency mats, with hundreds more people expected to need and seek shelter as dangerous conditions persist.
- Transportation procedures remain in place. But outreach providers are given help to distribute winter gear for as many as a couple of hundred people who remain reluctant to enter shelter or who need gear to keep warm and dry during daytime hours.
- Government employees and volunteers are tapped to fill shifts at warming centers, both to expand the response and to relieve volunteers and staffers who've been working for days.

DON'T WAIT FOR SEVERE WEATHER TO START HELPING!

To volunteer: Transition Projects is providing special hour-long training sessions for adults 18 and older interested in helping to staff a severe weather warming center. **Go to 211info.org to sign up.**

Volunteers will do hands-on work alongside Transition Projects staff and should be comfortable working with people experiencing homelessness. These active shifts take place on the coldest nights of the year, so having reliable transportation in inclement weather is important.

To donate: Outreach providers need winter gear they can pass out now, so folks outside are ready for the cold, and to have in reserve during an emergency. Having the right gear staged in the right places before a crisis will help providers better focus on direct services and life-saving efforts in the moment.

Needed items include **warm socks, waterproof gloves or mittens, waterproof winter coats, lightweight blankets, fleece hats, tarps, hand warmers, and rain ponchos.**

For drop-off locations and other tips, **call 211 or go to 211info.org.**