

Administrative Policy No. 09.16

Subject: Emergency Closures and Suspension of Operations

Information Contact: Emergency Management Services

Authorizing Source: [Chapter 38.52 RCW](#)
[Chapter 41.06 RCW](#)
[Directive by the Governor 13-02](#)
[WAC 357-31-260](#)
[WAC 357-31-275](#)
[WAC 357-31-280](#)

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Revised: New

Approved By: original signed by Sharon Swanson
Senior Director, Office of Policy & External Relations

A. Purpose

This policy identifies the requirements and general process for closing any DSHS facility or campus, in whole or in part, due to any emergency or disaster as defined within this policy. This policy also identifies the requirements and general process for suspension of operations of any DSHS mission essential function.

This policy, and any procedures or guidelines referenced herein, is intended only for internal departmental use. It is not intended, nor can it be relied upon, to create any substantive or procedural rights enforceable by any party involved in matters with DSHS.

B. Background

Natural or human caused emergencies and disasters happen every year in Washington. Common hazards include, but are not limited to: chemical spills and toxic releases; earthquakes; flooding; landslides and mudflows; wildfires; windstorms; and winter storms. The most commonly occurring effect of these events is a utility disruption (power outage).

Effects of these events occasionally disrupt DSHS operations to such extent that department facilities or campuses must be closed temporarily. Typically, DSHS is able to continue service delivery from other department locations and/or through alternative means.

In very rare instances, DSHS may suspend operations resulting in an interruption of one or

more of its mission essential functions.

Historically, DSHS has taken the position that residential facilities never close. Unfortunately, emergencies and disasters in other parts of the country have provided ample proof that the department must prepare, through its continuity planning process, for the possibility of such an occurrence.

Current administrative policy, AP 18-32 regarding inclement weather has proven insufficient in providing necessary guidance and direction to DSHS management regarding facility closures and suspension of operations and the difference between these two actions. This policy replaces AP 18-32, Inclement Weather.

C. **Scope**

This policy applies to all DSHS administrations, as defined in Section E. Definitions.

Emergencies excluded from this policy, as defined under [RCW 38.52.010](#), are those that “require a normal police, coroner, fire, rescue, emergency medical, or utility response.”

Also excluded from this policy is any direction or guidance related to employee leave. (*See additional guidance below.*) Questions regarding employee leave should be directed to the responsible supervisor or human resources personnel.

D. **Additional Guidance**

[WFSE Collective Bargaining Agreement](#)
[SEIU Healthcare Collective Bargaining Agreement](#)
[Coalition Collective Bargaining Agreement](#)
[Continuity Guidance Circular 2](#)
[Administrative Policy 14.15](#)

E. **Definitions**

1. Administration means the responsible DSHS administration, state hospitals, residential rehabilitation centers, other institutions and group homes, division, office, program, or similar organizational entity.
2. Closure means preventing partial or complete access, occupation or use of a building or section of a building from which DSHS mission essential functions are provided or directly supports the related operations.
3. Director of Emergency Management is responsible for the coordination of the agency wide emergency management program which supports and oversees enterprise level readiness through planning, training, and exercises. This position exercises delegated authority to represent and act on behalf of the DSHS Secretary on all matters pertaining to emergency management. Additionally, this position is responsible for state level coordination of mass care, emergency assistance, temporary housing, and human services planning and response under the *Washington State Comprehensive*

Emergency Management Plan, as promulgated by the Governor.

4. Emergency or disaster is defined under [RCW 38.52.010](#) as “an event or set of circumstances which: demands immediate action to preserve public health, protect life, protect public property, or to provide relief to any stricken community overtaken by such occurrences, or reaches such a dimension or degree of destructiveness as to warrant the governor declaring a state of emergency pursuant to RCW 43.06.010.”
5. Facility or campus includes all DSHS leased or owned buildings and buildings occupied or used by DSHS, including separate buildings that are in close proximity to one another. Examples of facilities include standalone buildings such as the Human Service Building in Olympia or separate buildings such as the Rock Pointe offices in Spokane. Examples of campuses include Western State Hospital, Yakima Valley School, and Naselle Youth Camp.
6. Mission essential functions are the limited set of organization level functions that must be continued throughout, or resumed rapidly after, a disruption of normal actions. Mission essential functions are typically required by federal or state statute, a funding source, direction by the secretary, or essential to the public’s trust in the department. The term mission essential function is set forth by FEMA and has been widely adopted by state agencies.
7. Suspension of operations means the interruption or cessation of any DSHS mission essential function. A suspension of operations means that DSHS is unable to provide one or more mission essential functions through any means, from any location. Some DSHS services must be continued without interruption for any period

F. Policy Requirements

8. Closures
 - a. The decision to close, not open, or delay the opening of a DSHS facility or portion of a facility is the responsibility of management at the impacted location and may be informed by other personnel with immediate and first-hand knowledge of circumstances.
 - b. Closure procedures sufficient to address all types of facilities and campuses must be developed by each DSHS Administration, reviewed annually and updated, as necessary. At a minimum, procedures must:
 - Be posted on each Administration’s intranet website and/or be made accessible by some other means to all employees of that Administration.
 - Reasonably address all hazards, natural and human caused.
 - Delineate all positions with delegated authority to close all or part of the facility or campus; in all cases this must include the DSHS director of emergency management.
 - Incorporate the positions from other DSHS programs in a shared facility. Examples include positions from: Central Maintenance Operations and the Office of Capital Programs.

- Describe the process by which decisions are coordinated across all DSHS administrations that may be co-located at a given facility or campus.
 - Identify the external stakeholders that must be notified and provide contact information.
 - Provide for the timely notification of all personnel who may be impacted at a given facility or campus.
- c. During an emergency, the immediate circumstances stemming from the impacts of the emergency may demand immediate action to protect personnel and state property. Time pressure may preclude convening all parties who are typically involved in decisions related to facility operations. In such instances, management at the impacted location must make a decision regarding the operational status in the interest of safeguarding life and property. For this reason, every DSHS facility and campus must have formally designated positions with the authority for making closure decisions for the entire facility or campus, when necessary. Designations should be of sufficient depth that a decision making authority is present or available at all times.
- d. A DSHS leased office that has been closed at the direction of DSHS management may not be occupied by staff, their family members, or other members of the public without the prior request and approval from DSHS executive management, or approved representative, and the facility lessor (landlord).
- e. The DSHS hospitals, Residential Habilitation Centers, institutions, and community facilities may not be accessed by the public (including employee family members) outside of normal visiting hours without the approval of the facility's Chief Executive Officer, Superintendent, Administrator, Assistant Secretary, or their designee due to the vulnerability of client populations, potential for introduction of contraband, and concern for the overall safe and secure operations.
- f. When management at the emergency impacted facility or campus decides to close all or any portion of the facility or campus, that decision must be communicated to the responsible appointing authorities and DSHS Emergency Management Services as soon as feasible once human safety and building security concerns have been addressed. In all cases, notification to appointing authorities and DSHS Emergency Management Services must be made within one business day. Communication with the appointing authority of a decision to close must never delay action to safeguard life during an emergency.
- g. Closure of any DSHS service delivery location applies to all DSHS programs at that location.
- h. When closure impacts the delivery of one or more DSHS mission essential functions, the respective Administration's continuity of operations plan and related procedures must be activated.

9. Suspension of Operations

- a. Continuity planning and related training, testing and exercise of personnel is both required and intended to prevent the suspension of DSHS operations.

- b. In accordance with [WAC 357-31-260](#), the Secretary may suspend operations when it is determined that public safety, health, or property is jeopardized due to emergency conditions.
- c. The Secretary must not suspend operations beyond fifteen calendar days without the approval of the state human resources director within the office of financial management, in accordance with [WAC 357-31-280](#).
- d. In the Secretary's absence, the decision to suspend operations may be made by any Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretary or Chief Officer.

10. Duty to report

- a. A facility closure must be reported to the Secretary's Office as soon as feasible once human safety and security concerns have been addressed.
- b. The report shall be made via telephone and email.
- c. In no case should the report be made later than one business day, unless communication systems are not operable.

11. Basic Employee Notification Procedures

DSHS is required under [WAC 357-31-275](#) to develop suspended operations procedures. The following constitutes minimum standards and each administration is expected to develop further guidance, as appropriate to their operations.

- a. Every DSHS facility or campus must have a primary means to notify all personnel who work at that location of closures and suspensions of operation. This may be as simple as an outgoing message on a central phone line or a call down list.
- b. Each administration must formally designate staff responsible for coordinating timely notification to employees regarding facility closure and suspension of operations. At a minimum, the following methods are available to all administrations and must be maintained by designated staff:
 - Duty station status report. This is a web based tool accessible on the internet and lists the operational status of all DSHS facilities statewide.
 - Toll-free employee emergency information line. This system provides redundancy to the duty station status report and is available to all employees.
- c. During emergencies, it may not always be feasible for DSHS to provide prior notification to staff of a closure or suspension of operations. In such instances, employees covered under a Collective Bargaining Agreement shall refer to provisions therein regarding use of leave.
- d. When a suspension of operations is in effect, affected personnel may be reassigned to other duties, work different hours, at other work locations within a reasonable distance from the employee's assigned duty station. Such reassignments must be made in accordance with applicable Collective

Bargaining Agreements.

12. Return to Normal Operations

- a. For facility closures, the decision to return to normal operations must be specified in the emergency response plan.
- b. In instances when one or more Administration suspends operations, the return to normal operations is dependent on the scope and scale of the damages or disruption to the facility caused by the emergency. The primary facility may be re-occupied with minimal action taken, or substantial repairs may be needed, or the primary facility may not be habitable for an extended period of time. These considerations must be addressed in each Administration and residential program continuity of operations plan.

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