

SEVERE WEATHER POLICY AND PROCEDURES



OKC Parks and Recreation Department
Recreation Division

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Prepared by the Severe Weather Advisory Committee

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Overview & Scope

This Severe Weather Policy (SWP) is designed to act as the internal policy covering any weather considered severe for the Recreation Division of the City of Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department. Elements of this policy rely on highly technical information from the National Weather Service (NWS). The NWS is the primary data source for making informed decisions about severe weather forecasts. If primary sources are not available, secondary data sources such as local news, radio broadcasts, digital forecasts (applications), etc. may be used for weather information.

The goal of this policy is to provide education and tools to all staff members of the Recreation Division so that they may act within the guidelines of this policy and make decisions as to the operational status of their facilities or programs to ensure patron quality of service and safety. The Parks and Recreation Department reserves the right to cancel or change any program or event due to severe weather conditions and its effects. The policy is structured to approach severe weather with a proactive planning element, as well as reactive instructions for situations where being proactive is not feasible.

Severe Weather Defined

Severe weather within this policy is defined as any form of weather that presents the risk of the following conditions: tornados, straight line winds, derechos, flash flooding, or damaging hail (see below for descriptions). These conditions are defined by the NWS Storm Prediction Center (SPC) and categorized into Severe Thunderstorm Risk Categories. These categories range from 1 (Marginal) to 5 (High). This scale is shown in Figure 1 below, and is referenced regularly throughout this policy.

Terms Defined:

- *Damaging hail* refers to any hail that is 2" (golf ball to tennis ball) in diameter or greater that can lead to property damage and unsafe conditions.
- A *derecho* is a widespread, long-lived wind storm associated with rapidly moving showers or thunderstorms. A derecho is capable of producing destruction similar to a tornado, but the damage typically occurs along a relatively straight path.
- *Flash flooding* describes heavy or excessive rainfall that occurs in a short period of time, generally less than six hours. Flash floods are usually characterized by fast-moving water.
 - Please note that flooding is a longer term event than flash flooding that may last days or weeks. Flooding is defined as ponding of water due to rainfall.
- *Straight line winds* is a term used to differentiate the destruction caused by damaging winds from tornado damage. Damaging winds are classified as those exceeding 50 to 60 mph.

Understanding Severe Thunderstorm Risk Categories







THUNDERSTORMS (no label)	1 - MARGINAL (MRGL)	2 - SLIGHT (SLGT)	3 - ENHANCED (ENH)	4 - MODERATE (MDT)	5 - HIGH (HIGH)
No severe* thunderstorms expected	Isolated severe thunderstorms possible	Scattered severe storms possible	Numerous severe storms possible	Widespread severe storms likely	Widespread severe storms expected
Lightning/flooding threats exist with <u>all</u> thunderstorms	Limited in duration and/or coverage and/or intensity	Short-lived and/or not widespread, isolated intense storms possible	More persistent and/or widespread, a few intense	Long-lived, widespread and intense	Long-lived, very widespread and particularly intense
					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winds to 40 mph • Small hail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winds 40-60 mph • Hail up to 1" • Low tornado risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or two tornadoes • Reports of strong winds/wind damage • Hail ~1", isolated 2" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few tornadoes • Several reports of wind damage • Damaging hail, 1 - 2" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong tornadoes • Widespread wind damage • Destructive hail, 2" + 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tornado outbreak • Derecho
<small>* NWS defines a severe thunderstorm as measured wind gusts to at least 58 mph, and/or hail to at least one inch in diameter, and/or a tornado. All thunderstorm categories imply lightning and the potential for flooding. Categories are also tied to the probability of a severe weather event within 25 miles of your location.</small>					

Figure 1: Severe Thunderstorm Risk Categories

In Oklahoma the highest frequency for severe weather is during the months of March, April, May and June with the peak hours being between 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. However, severe weather can occur at any time throughout the year. Severe weather, within the view of this policy, does not include the following conditions: rain, lightning, wind, snow, ice, or flooding. All of these weather conditions are relative to your precise location. Please refer to program specific policies for rain, lightning and wind related conditions.

Tornado Safety Tips:

- If you are inside a building, go to the basement (if available) or to an interior room on the lowest floor, such as a closet or bathroom. Wrap yourself in overcoats or blankets to protect yourself from flying debris.
- If you are inside a vehicle, abandon the vehicle immediately. Find a substantial structure or designated tornado shelter. If in your car, remember that highway bridges are not designed as tornado shelters, and make for very poor shelter.
- If you are outside with no suitable structure nearby, lie flat in the nearest ditch or depression and use your hands to cover your head.

Flash Flood Safety Tips:

- While driving:
 - Avoid low water crossings.
 - Use alternate routes to avoid flood prone areas.

- Leave your vehicle immediately if it stalls in flood waters.
- If you can do so safely, move to higher ground.
- If you are outside:
 - Stay away from flooded creeks, streams or drainage ditches.
 - Move to higher ground, if possible.
 - Flowing water can quickly sweep away even the strongest swimmers. Soggy banks can collapse, dumping you into flood waters.

Severe Winter Weather Defined

Severe winter weather within this policy is defined as blizzards, winter storms, and ice storms. *Winter Storm Watches* are issued for blizzards, winter storms and wind chill. A Winter Storm Watch refers to a winter storm that could produce heavy snow, sleet, or freezing rain and cause significant impacts. *Winter Storm Warnings* are issued for blizzards, ice storms, winter storms and wind chill of -25 degrees Fahrenheit or below. A Winter Storm Warning will be issued when there is a high confidence level that a winter storm will produce heavy snow, sleet or freezing rain that can cause significant impacts. A *Winter Weather Advisory* refers to winter weather that can affect travel, such as light amounts of wintry precipitation or patchy blowing snow.

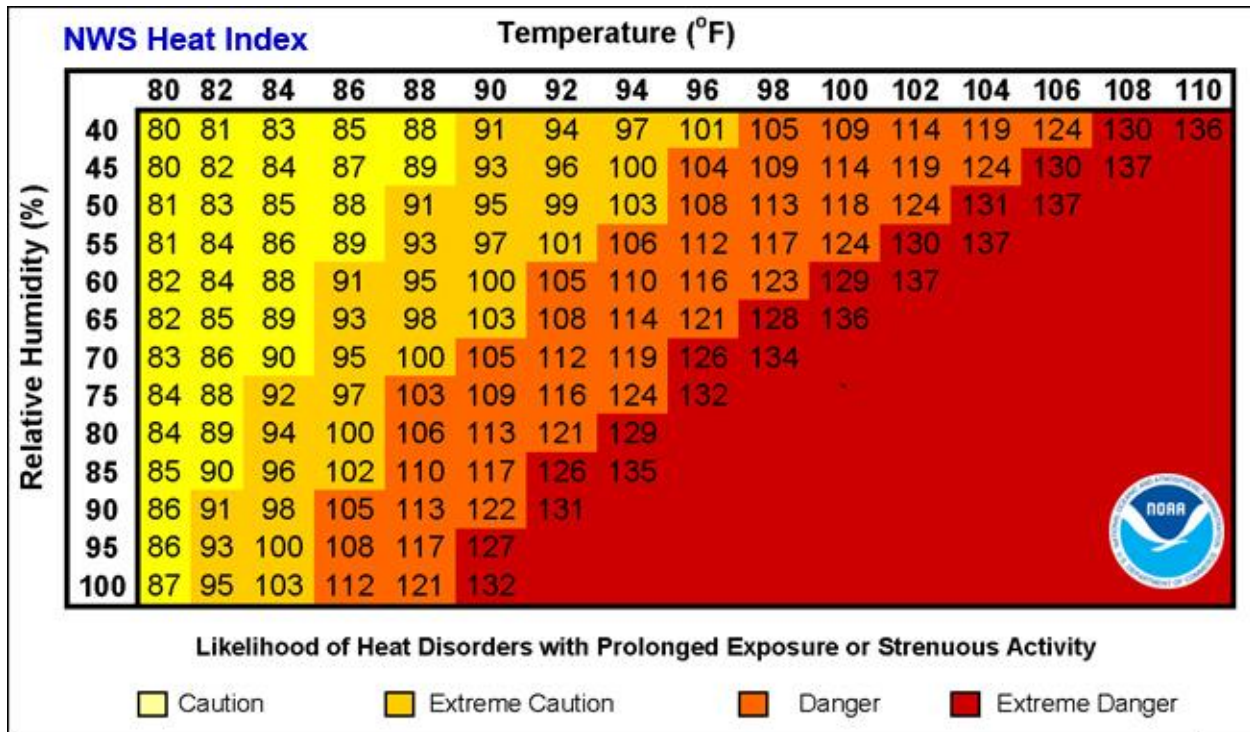
Terms Defined:

- A *blizzard* refers to snow and/or blowing snow that reduces visibility to ¼ mile or less for 3 hours or longer. A blizzard also includes sustained winds of 35 mph or greater or frequent gusts to 35 mph or greater. Please note that there is no temperature requirement that must be met to reach blizzard conditions.
- An *ice storm* is considered an accumulation of ice that is ¼ inch or more.
- *Winter storms* are defined as a combination of significant and hazardous winter weather, which includes the following:
 - 5 inches or more of snow/sleet within a 12-hour period or 7 inches or more of snow/sleet within a 24-hour period and/or
 - A significant amount of ice accumulation that leads to damaged trees or powerlines and/or
 - A life threatening or damaging combination of snow and/or ice accumulation with wind.

Weather Policies

Hot Weather Policy

Outdoor programs/events should be cancelled or delayed if either the ambient (still air) or the heat index is going to be 105 degrees Fahrenheit or above. Program/event participants should be notified at a minimum of 2 hours before the start of the program/event. Please refer to a program's specific cancellation policy for information regarding rescheduling, refunds, etc.



Hot Temperature Considerations:

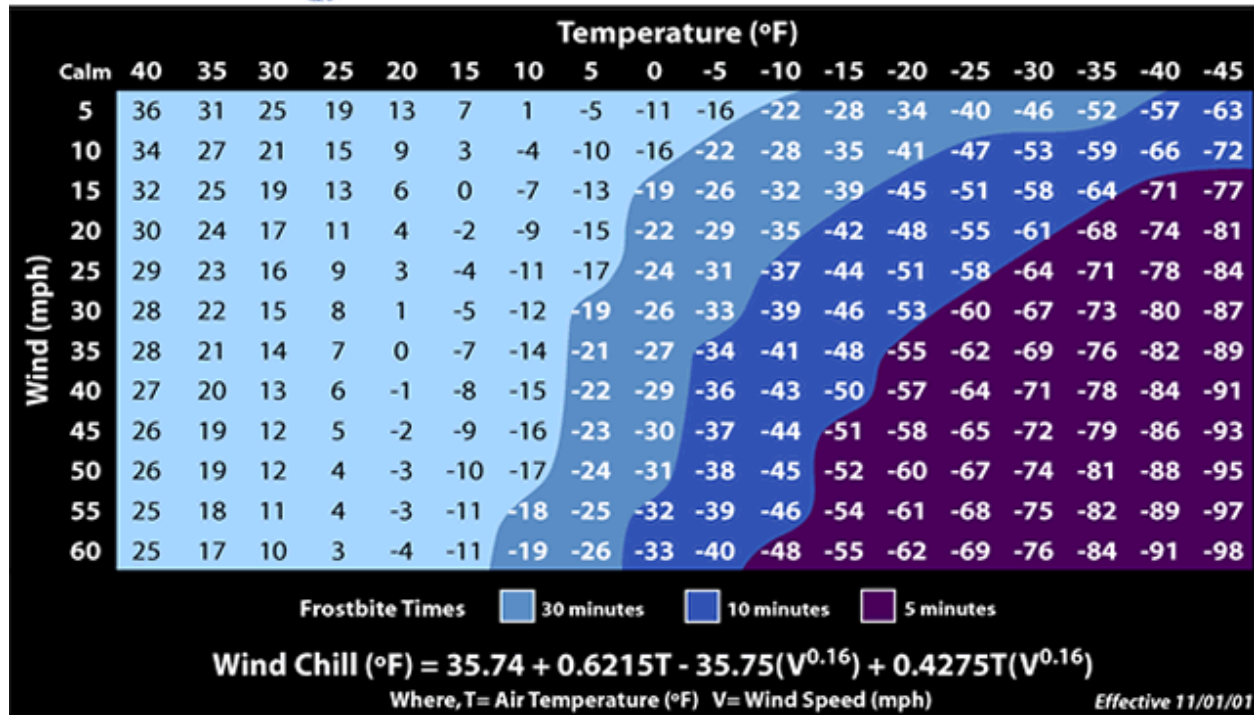
- 80 degrees Fahrenheit or below is considered comfortable
- 90 degrees Fahrenheit is beginning to feel uncomfortable
- 100 degrees Fahrenheit is uncomfortable and may be hazardous
- 110 degrees Fahrenheit is considered dangerous

Cold Weather Policy

Outdoor programs/events should be cancelled or delayed if either the ambient (still air) or the wind chill is expected to be 35 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Program/event participants should be notified at a minimum of 2 hours before the start of the program/event. Please refer to a program’s specific cancellation policy for information regarding rescheduling, refunds, etc.



Wind Chill Chart



Cold Temperature Considerations:

- 30 degrees Fahrenheit is chilly and generally uncomfortable
- 15 to 30 degrees Fahrenheit is cold
- 0 to 15 degrees Fahrenheit is very cold
- -20 to 0 degrees Fahrenheit is bitter cold with significant risk of frostbite
- -20 to -60 degrees Fahrenheit is extremely cold and frostbite is likely
- -60 or below is frigid and exposed skin will freeze in 1 minute

Lightning Policy

All Recreation employees will activate this policy when they first see lightning or hear thunder. This is the time go to a building. Lightning often precedes rain; so don't wait for the rain to suspend activities. The *30/30 Rule* says to shut down all outside activities when lightning is six miles away. Use a "flash to bang" (lightning to thunder) count of five seconds equals one mile (10 seconds = 2 miles; 20 seconds = 4 miles; 30 seconds = 6 miles).

Lightning Safety Tips

- If you are outside:
 - Seek safe shelter immediately (in vehicles, permanent building).
 - Crouch down. Put feet together. Place hands over ears to minimize hearing damage from thunder.
 - Avoid proximity (minimum of 15 ft.) to other people.

- Avoid the following areas:
 - Avoid water
 - High Ground or Rooftops
 - Open Spaces
 - Metal Objects (electric wire, fences, machinery, motors, power tools)
 - Power & Light Poles
 - Electrical Equipment
 - Under Trees

- If you are indoors:
 - Avoid water.
 - Stay away from doors and windows.
 - Do not use the telephone.
 - Take off headsets.
 - Turn off, unplug and stay away from appliances, computers, power tools and TV sets. Lightning may strike exterior electric and phone lines, creating/inducing shocks to inside equipment.

Aquatics Specific Policies

Aquatics Specific Lightning Policy

If lightning is seen or thunder is heard all participants should be removed from any pools, slides, or other bodies of water at the aquatic facility. Patrons may remain on the deck or in the facility until such a time as staff following the *30/30 Rule* deem that lightning is six or fewer miles away.

At the point where lightning is six miles or less from an aquatic facility, staff should clear the deck and any areas not under cover. Cover shall be considered inside of a building (bathhouse, office, etc.) or inside of a vehicle.

Aquatics Cold Weather Policy

Indoor aquatic facility shall operate without regard to outside temperatures barring the facility is heated. If a facility does not have heating, it will close if deck air temperatures are below 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

Outdoor aquatic facilities will not open until temperatures reported by the nearest Oklahoma Mesonet station are in excess of 65 degrees Fahrenheit. If temperatures drop below 65 degrees while an outdoor facility is open, the facility will remain open unless conditions merit for safety reasons or all patrons leave on their own.

Aquatics Hot Weather Policy

Aquatic facilities shall remain open during extreme heat. However, in temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit the Aquatics Field Operations Supervisor may implement

short closures of the pools in facilities for safety breaks, a short break from normal pool operations.

Aquatic Specific Rain Policy

Outdoor pools shall close if rain becomes strong enough to prevent staff from being able to see the bottom of the pool. The pool shall remain closed until such a time as the bottom of the pool is visible again.

Policy for Cancellations or Delays for Outdoor Programs

The Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation staff reserves the right to cancel or delay any outdoor event/program due to unsafe venue/field conditions or severe weather conditions, including severe winter weather. Cancellation or delay of programs should be mirrored with the closure of Oklahoma City Public Schools' facilities. In the event of a severe weather threat that is rated as either a risk category level 4 (moderate) or level 5 (high) by the National Weather Service, any outdoor event or program should be cancelled or delayed at a minimum of 2 hours before it is set to begin. All outdoor events/programs are required to have alternative plans for watch days that have a risk level 1 (marginal), level 2 (slight), or level 3 (enhanced). Severe Winter Weather is not defined using risk categories, but is to be included in this 2 hour minimum policy. Please refer to a program's specific cancellation policy for information regarding rescheduling, refunds, etc.

Policy for Cancellations or Delays for Indoor Programs

The Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation staff reserves the right to cancel or delay any indoor event/program due to severe weather conditions, including severe winter weather. Closure of facilities will be at the discretion of the Parks Director. Cancellation or delay of programs should be mirrored with the closure of Oklahoma City Public Schools' facilities. In the event of a severe weather threat that is rated as either a risk category level 4 (moderate) or level 5 (high) by the National Weather Service, any indoor program should be cancelled or delayed at a minimum of 2 hours before the weather threat is said to begin. Severe Winter Weather is not defined using risk categories, but is to be included in this 2 hour minimum policy. Please refer to a program's specific cancellation policy for information regarding rescheduling, refunds, etc.

Staff Responsibilities and Procedures for Outdoor Programs

In the event of severe weather (i.e., tornados, straight line winds, derechos, flash flooding, damaging hail, or severe winter weather), the following procedures should be followed.

- There will always be a staff member on duty that is designated to take charge during a severe weather situation.
- Stay informed of weather conditions through the primary data source (i.e., National Weather Service) if available or secondary data sources if necessary.

- Staff members should ensure to stop all programming in the event of a facility closure (due to severe weather).
- All staff members are responsible for assisting in the safety of our patrons.
 - Special consideration must always be taken in regard to people with disabilities during an emergency.
- Care should be taken not to create panic in those visiting our facilities during severe weather conditions. If the facility is not closed, patrons should not be forced to leave the facility, but instead let them make that decision.
- Once any severe weather has passed, staff should assess the facility and continue programming if able based on program and facility conditions.

Staff Responsibilities and Procedures for Indoor Programs

In the event of severe weather (i.e., tornados, straight line winds, derechos, flash flooding, damaging hail, or severe winter weather) and the facility is not closed, the following procedures should be followed.

- There will always be a staff member on duty that is designated to take charge during a severe weather situation.
- Stay informed of weather conditions through the primary data source (i.e., National Weather Service) if available or secondary data sources if necessary.
- Staff members should ensure to stop all programming in the event of a facility closure (due to severe weather).
- All staff members are responsible for assisting in the safety of our patrons.
 - Special consideration must always be taken in regard to people with disabilities during an emergency.
- Care should be taken not to create panic in those visiting our facilities during severe weather conditions. If the facility is not closed, patrons should not be forced to leave the facility, but instead let them make that decision.
- Staff should be aware that indoor facilities located inside or near a park may have park users that are forced to take refuge inside our facilities. Although this situation will increase attendance inside refuge areas, our commitment to these individuals should be the same as anyone else using the facility. Therefore, as plans are made during a watch situation, staff should also consider these individuals as an additional factor.
- If a tornado warning/siren is issued then staff needs to announce to each room, “May I have your attention please? A tornado warning has been issued for our current location. Please follow staff instructions as they guide you to a designated refuge area.”
- In the event of a tornado warning/siren, all staff will direct patrons to a designated tornado refuge area or an area with no exterior walls.

- Once safely inside a refuge area, staff will review the tornado safety position with patrons. In the event of a tornado touchdown, direct patrons to kneel with their head between their legs and their arms covering their head.
- Assigned staff members will stay with patrons unless otherwise directed by a staff person in charge.
- Remain sheltered until it is announced that the tornado threat is over.
- Once any severe weather has passed, staff should assess the facility and continue programming if able based on program and facility conditions.

Communications Plan

Internal Communications Plan:

- Please contact the primary staff member for the appropriate section to inform them of the closure of a facility or cancellation of a program. It is not necessary to contact these persons prior to implementation of the SWP, however contacting them should be done in a timely manner if possible.
- In the event of the SWP being enacted, all staff members currently on duty should be made aware.
- A staff member should monitor weather forecast using one of the following:
 - Weather radio
 - Local TV or radio station
 - Approved Weather app or website
- If an outdoor program is cancelled/delayed or a facility is closed due to severe weather, all staff members scheduled to work during those times should be informed.

External Communications Plan:

- If an outdoor program is either delayed or canceled or a facility is closed, all participants should be contacted if the situation allows in advance of a program start time.
 - A consistent message that is both accurate and timely should always be conveyed to the public.
- All delays, cancellations and facility closures should immediately be announced on all public forums, including social media, rain out lines, city website, etc. if available.

Severe Weather Advisory Committee:

The Severe Weather Advisory Committee (SWAC) was established to create this policy, implement this policy, provide periodic updates to this policy, as well as facilitate training to staff within the Recreation Division on the curriculum within this policy. Refer to Employee Training Manual for more information.