



# GENERAL ORDER OPS-68 SEVERE WEATHER

EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 15, 2005

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This General Order contains the following numbered sections:

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- X. THE RED CROSS

## **I. POLICY**

The Howard County Department of Police (HCPD) shall strive to minimize the hazardous effects of severe weather and utilize all available resources to continue police services and promote the safety and security of the citizens.

## **II. DEFINITION**

Severe weather is defined as violent electrical storms, substantial rainfall, flooding, high winds, tornadoes, destructive hail and winter storms that can cause major disruption of normal activities, property damage, injury and loss of life.

## **III. PROCEDURES**

- A. During times of severe weather and/or heavy snow the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) may be activated to coordinate resources and responses. The HCPD will assign a representative to the EOC.<sup>1</sup>
- B. The Police Tactical Operations Center (PTOC) should be activated to manage police operations and the scheduling of available personnel. The PTOC can be activated by a Deputy Chief of Police or an Incident Commander, regardless of the activation of the EOC.<sup>2</sup>
- C. A severe weather event will necessitate the implementation of the Incident Command System, consistent with General Order OPS-27.<sup>3</sup>
- D. Operations Command will produce an annual Snow Emergency Plan and will generate an OPS Plan when severe weather events are anticipated.
- E. As severe weather is forecast and/or develops, the Watch Commander or Incident Commander shall:
  - 1. Notify the District and the Operations Commanders of the developing situation.<sup>4</sup>
  - 2. Arrange for Department-owned four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles to be available for patrol use through their respective District Patrol Office.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 i

<sup>2</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 c

<sup>3</sup> CALEA 46.1.11 a

<sup>4</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 a

<sup>5</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 n

3. Consider the possibility of a high-risk situation that would need an immediate response by tactical officers before mobilizing any 4WD vehicle assigned to the Tactical Section. Should these vehicles be assigned to the weather event, provisions will first ensure that needed Tactical personnel are provided transportation.<sup>6</sup>
4. Consider requesting additional 4WD assets via EOC (if activated) in accordance with the Howard County snow plan. National Guard assets may be requested through MEMA.<sup>7</sup> Additional resources include Howard County Emergency Management, which may be able to access a list of citizen volunteers with 4WD vehicles.
5. Consider "holding over" on-duty personnel or requesting the institution of a mobilization phase, consistent with General Order OPS-03, Emergency Mobilization, to handle anticipated needs.
6. Consider instructing non-4WD field units not to randomly patrol as the situation worsens. Patrol officers may be ordered to station themselves at a Fire Station in their beat.
7. Consider suspending routine police services that do not affect health and safety and can be handled at a more opportune time.
8. Begin using 4WD vehicles for patrol as the situation worsens. 4WD vehicles should remain on constant patrol to check for stranded persons and respond to those emergencies a standard police vehicle cannot reach. To maintain police service, 4WD vehicles will be deployed as follows:
  - a. Area A - Two 4WD's
  - b. Area B - Two 4WD
  - c. Area C - One 4WD
  - d. Area D - One 4WD
  - e. Area E - One 4WD
  - f. Northern District Station - use/reserve - One 4WD
  - g. Southern District Station - use/reserve - One 4WD

**NOTE:** The watch commander or incident commander has the authority to change the deployment of resources as the situation warrants.

- F. 4WD vehicles shall have extraneous equipment such as K-9 cages and tactical gear removed from them, if possible prior to deployment. Rear seats should be reinstalled for transporting stranded persons. Each vehicle should be manned with two (2) officers for safety reasons.
- G. Each vehicle shall be checked for first-aid equipment, flares, blankets, and general readiness prior to deployment.<sup>8</sup>
- H. If the EOC becomes activated, additional 4WD vehicles may become available through other County and State agencies and the Maryland National Guard. An operator may be supplied with each of these vehicles. Whenever possible, these vehicles should also be manned by two officers and have the necessary first aid equipment. Communications will be conducted via the officers' portable radio. These vehicles will not be deployed unless it carries at least one spare battery for the portable radio. If the vehicle is County owned and has a mobile radio with 800 MHz capabilities, the spare battery is not required.<sup>9</sup>
- I. The Support Services Division will coordinate with Central Fleet to supply tire chains for non-4WD vehicles.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 n

<sup>7</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 j

<sup>8</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 m

<sup>9</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 a, m

<sup>10</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 m

**IV. EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM**<sup>11</sup>

- A. In addition to the Department's regular duties of preserving life and property, it will also be responsible for emergency transportation during periods of severe weather. This Emergency Transportation System will go into effect when the EOC is activated due to severe weather. 4WD vehicles from the Department, other County agencies, the military, and civilian volunteers will serve the following functions:
  - 1. Transportation for police service;
  - 2. Transportation support for County agencies;
  - 3. Transportation support for legitimate civilian emergencies.
- B. All requests for transportation support, except for those in the course of normal police services, shall be forwarded to the EOC for disposition.

**V. HOUSING OF POLICE PERSONNEL**

- A. As the weather situation deteriorates, consideration must be given to the appropriate housing of HCPD personnel. Although a 4WD capability exists for ferrying personnel, the time expended in such an effort may be better spent devoted to operational tasks. When it becomes evident that the time is approaching where it will no longer be practical to transport personnel to and from residences, the following contacts should be made:
  - 1. Contact the EOC to begin preparations for food and bedding to be transported to designated HCPD facilities.
  - 2. Contact the Detention Center to see what assistance they can offer in regard to meals, bedding, food and linens.
  - 3. Consider the use of local private resources (i.e. hotels, motels, etc. in close proximity)
- B. As these supplies become available, two (2) dormitory areas will be established at each District Station. A female area will be established in close proximity to the female locker room with its shower facilities. A male dormitory will be established in the Briefing Room. Shower facilities are available in the male locker room.
- C. If it is deemed more practical to house personnel outside of the District Stations, other options to be considered are schools, fire stations, community centers, etc.

**VI. TEMPORARY ASSIGNMENT OF PERSONNEL**

- A. During conditions of severe weather, it is very likely that only a limited number of personnel will be available to maintain police service. These personnel will be temporarily reassigned to form the necessary number of operational units to provide the patrol function.
- B. Personnel will be formed into either two or three shifts, as needed, and will be supervised by temporary reassignment of those available supervisors. These temporary units will provide police service to the County until the weather emergency abates.
- C. Commanders should consider requesting a mobilization phase consistent with General Order OPS-03, Emergency Mobilization.

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<sup>11</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 n

**VII. VEHICLE REMOVAL OPERATIONS**

- A. A primary concern in the handling of a weather emergency is the clearing of roadways (snow, debris) so that traffic flow can return to normal. An impediment to the clearing operations of heavy equipment is usually the numerous abandoned vehicles left on the roadside or in the roadway. Therefore, the Police Department will start removing these abandoned vehicles as soon as practical in order to prevent a delay in clean-up operations.
- B. Legal authority for this removal is granted by:<sup>12</sup>
  - 1. Transportation Article, Annotated Code of Maryland

“A police department may take any abandoned vehicle into custody. For this purpose, the police department may use its own personnel, equipment, and facilities for removing, preserving and storing abandoned vehicles.”
  - 2. Howard County Code

“When authorized by the laws of this state or county, members of the police department may remove a vehicle from a street or highway to an approved garage or to a requested site designated or maintained by the police department, or otherwise maintained by this county.”
  - 3. Howard County Code

“It shall also be unlawful to park a vehicle on such highways (snow emergency roads) during the period of the emergency and the Howard County Police or Maryland State Police are hereby authorized to have such vehicle so parked towed from said highway.”
- C. Vehicle removal operations shall be conducted in accordance with current impoundment procedures.

**VIII. ROAD CLOSURES**

During severe weather events, some County roads routinely develop hazardous conditions, such as low-lying roads that are prone to flooding or steep hills during snow or icy conditions. Officers who are familiar with such hazards in their beats are encouraged to pre-emptively close these roads to ensure the safety of motorists. Supervisory approval should be obtained prior to closing a roadway. The Supervisor shall be responsible for ensuring appropriate notifications (i.e. to the EOC or the Division of Communications).<sup>13</sup>

**IX. GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING FLOODING CONDITIONS**

Officers need to be cognizant of the danger presented by even a small amount of fast moving water when determining whether to enter a flooded area, either in a vehicle or on foot. Officer safety may necessitate waiting for the Department of Fire and Rescue Services to aid a stranded motorist or citizen.

- A. When called to the scene of significant flooding, the area supervisor shall:
  - 1. Institute the Incident Command System and take command of police operations at the scene, in accordance with General Order OPS-27, Incident Command System;<sup>14</sup>
  - 2. Summon additional units as available;

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<sup>12</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 q

<sup>13</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 l

<sup>14</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 d, 46.1.11a

3. Provide for any rescue response as needed (personnel are reminded that water rescue operations are inherently dangerous and proper safety considerations are warranted, the use of the Swift Water Rescue Team should be considered, as appropriate);
  4. Block access to the affected area to prevent additional victims;
  5. Begin evacuations as necessary;
  6. Coordinate with on-scene senior fire officer, and establish Unified Command if applicable;
  7. Ensure that the watch commander is notified.<sup>15</sup>
- B. When called to the scene of significant flooding, the watch commander shall:
1. Take command of police operations at the scene;
  2. If seriousness indicates, request that the EOC be activated for additional guidance;
  3. Have the appropriate District and Operations Commanders notified;
  4. Establish an incident command post;<sup>16</sup>
  5. Notify residents and proceed with evacuations, as necessary;<sup>17</sup>
  6. Receive specific guidance from the EOC in regard to evacuations and shelter locations;
  7. Be aware of the possibility of providing transportation to shelters;<sup>18</sup>
  8. Provide security for evacuated buildings and property;<sup>19</sup>
  9. Provide security for shelters, if needed;<sup>20</sup>
  10. Record specific locations (street addresses or block numbers) that are affected by the flooding. These will be furnished to the Department of Public Works for post-incident inspection of buildings.<sup>21</sup>
  11. Have the damaged areas photographed, if possible. When the flood has subsided, guidance for clean-up operations and returning residents to the affected area will come from the EOC.<sup>22</sup>

**X. THE RED CROSS**

The American Red Cross will respond whenever any person is left homeless due to a disaster. When officers are on a disaster scene, they will ensure that Red Cross personnel desiring entry to the scene have valid identification. The Red Cross will be contacted by the following procedures:

- A. If the EOC is open, they will notify the Red Cross.
- B. If the Red Cross is needed due to a fire, the Department of Fire and Rescue Services will make notification.

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<sup>15</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 d  
<sup>16</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 c  
<sup>17</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 f, g  
<sup>18</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 n  
<sup>19</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 k  
<sup>20</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 k  
<sup>21</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 r  
<sup>22</sup> CALEA 46.1.2 r

- C. If the EOC is not open or the Fire Department is not on the scene, the decision to contact the Red Cross will be made by the incident commander. Notification will be made via the Communications Division.

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