



# Winter Weather Advisory Alerts and Employee Communication Systems

Winter weather can change suddenly and freezing rain and snow can quickly turn school sidewalks and parking lots into dangerous sheets of black ice. These weather changes may contribute to serious slip and fall injuries in parking lots, on sidewalks and at school entrances. The type of weather alert systems a school or college has in place to monitor changing conditions and promptly alert employees can play a big role in reducing these injuries throughout the winter season.

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## Written program and procedures

Every school or college should have a written program that outlines the procedures in place for monitoring changes to winter weather conditions, as well as the process of communicating severe weather advisories and alerts to employees. The program should include important information covering:

- The types of alert systems used
- Employee responsibilities
- Communication and notification systems
- School or college closing procedures and call in phone numbers
- Information technology systems used

In the weeks leading up to the winter season, all employees should receive an update on the school's or college's program to remind them of the procedures that have been established. You can also refer to UH's "Snow and Ice Removal Program" resource documents for additional information, including checklists, contractor procedures, and logs.



## Designate employee(s) to monitor severe winter weather

Within the written program, management needs to designate responsibility for monitoring weather to a specific individual, department or team. The team may include administrative staff, building facilities personnel, maintenance employees or safety/security, depending on the staffing resources of your school.

The team should be thoroughly trained on the school's program, as well as any related slip and fall prevention programs. These individuals should review the written program in preparation for winter to discuss the type of weather alerts and employee communication systems in place. The written program should be reviewed annually by the team and then communicated to all educators and staff each year.

The team should also work together with their Information Technology (IT) department to review available options and how they could be safely integrated into your company's technology systems.

## Winter weather advisory and alert systems

One of the most important aspects to a winter slip and fall prevention program is the way an organization stays alert to changing weather conditions. Some of the most common sources of weather notification come through various channels of communication including:

- Live television and radio
- Weather radios
- Computer desktop websites and widgets
- Smartphone applications

Using Doppler radar technology, local TV and radio stations provide some of the most timely information about approaching weather systems that could generate freezing rain or high levels of snow accumulation. Weather radios with SAME technology can be programmed to provide weather advisories and alerts specific to certain geographic areas.

Various types of computer desktop websites and widgets are also available to provide information on current weather conditions, weather advisories or alerts and stream live local radar images for the user's specific area. Smartphone apps are also one of the latest ways to stay informed. These weather apps can be downloaded to provide weather information, text alerts and radar images.

Your winter weather team should periodically review the type of weather advisory and alert systems available for their local area. Evaluate the options, make improvements to existing systems, and choose additional systems that provide the best weather information and alerts for the local area.

You can find links later in this document to weather alert resources, instruments and information.

## Communicating severe winter weather advisories to employees

Once severe winter weather conditions have been identified, employees need to quickly be notified that dangerous slip and fall conditions may exist and that proper precautions need to be taken to prevent injury. Communication systems need to properly alert employees that are coming onto the premises, leaving the building or traveling on business by vehicle. One great way to do so is by using electronic messaging boards to communicate to employees and guests that weather conditions in parking lots may be dangerous.



Building and grounds personnel should immediately be contacted to perform additional surface treatments and salting, especially at the beginning and end of school days. To create additional awareness to employees, temporary warning signage or orange safety cones can be placed near school entrances/exits, along walkways/steps, near school bus lines and in parking lot entrances/exits where needed.

If contractors are used for snow and ice removal at your company, ask the contractor how they stay informed about changing weather conditions. Review your Snow and Ice Removal Program, the procedures for their notification and verify how quickly they can respond to your location to provide prompt snow removal and salting of entrances, sidewalks and parking lot areas. The program should state the name and phone number of the contractor as well as when it is appropriate to contact them.

Your team should work with your IT and facilities personnel to review the various ways that educators and staff can be notified of winter weather advisories, alerts and slippery conditions in outdoor parking lots, sidewalks and steps. These may include:

- Use external electronic message signs to warn employees and visitors about hazardous conditions on your property
- Email blasts to desktop computers and smartphones
- Personal address systems
- Electronic monitors in hallways and entrances
- Company Intranet and website postings
- Placing temporary “Slip and Fall Hazard” warning signs or orange safety cones along building exits and walkways to alert anyone leaving the property.
- Placing temporary “Slip and Fall Hazard” warning signs at the entrances to parking lots to alert employees and visitors coming onto the property.



## General weather alert resources

**National Weather Service** — Provides weather and climate forecasts and warnings through a collection of national and regional centers as well as 122 local weather forecast offices. <http://weather.gov/>

**Emergency Alert System** — A national public warning system that requires the President have communications capabilities to address the American public during a national emergency. <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/emergency-alert-system-eas>



## Facility closings

You should establish procedures for closing schools and facilities since closings help protect staff and students from slip and fall injuries, as well as the exposures associated with driving during adverse weather.

You should select the members of upper management to monitor weather forecasts and make the decision to close school facilities. Based on the weather forecast, the closing could be announced the night before or early morning of a given school day. The closings may also need to be communicated after the school day has begun due to unforeseen or quickly changing weather conditions. Your policy should outline the type of communication systems in place to notify employees of a school or building closing. Other options include the use of an automatic notification system that will call or text employees on their home or cell phone.

## Winter weather alert resources

**Live Local Television and Radio Stations** — Monitor your local TV and radio stations for winter weather alerts, notifications and periodic updates.

**Weather Radios** — Weather radios are uniquely designed to monitor the National Weather Radio service broadcast on specific frequencies. They respond to a warning signal by sounding an alert or message. Radios with Specific-Area Message Encoding (SAME) allows the user to set the radio to only activate when an alert contains the (SAME) code that the user has programmed into the radio. Weather radios are widely sold through various consumer electronics stores and the web.

- <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/>
- <http://www.home-weather-stations-guide.com/weather-radio.html>

**Computer Desktop Websites and Widgets** — Websites and computer widgets are widely available and allow users to monitor current weather conditions, view animated radar images and receive severe weather alerts.

- <http://www.weather.com/>
- <http://www.accuweather.com/>

**Smartphone Apps** — Anyone with a smartphone now has access to a wide-variety of apps that provide weather alerts. These apps include valuable information on current weather conditions, the forecast and National Weather Service (NWS) alerts for specific locations. Check with you cellular phone service provider for suggestions on available applications, pricing and downloading instructions.

- <http://weather.weatherbug.com/>
- <http://www.weather.com/apps>

