

Decision-Making Process for Determining Smithsonian Public Facility Operations in the National Capital Region (NCR) during Winter Weather Events

1/13/2016

Background

Winter weather presents many challenges, ranging from operational impacts to personal safety, but rarely are we surprised by the onslaught of winter weather. Complex forecast models make it possible to foresee trouble days in advance in most cases. The challenge for the National Capital Region (NCR) is that, many times, we are “on the line” between heavy, cold rain or heavy snow or ice. A few degrees make all the difference. For these reasons, public operations decisions will be made as late as possible to ensure the most accurate forecast information is considered, while still allowing for the appropriate notification period required to adequately staff the facilities and prepare for public opening. **This Process is for all Smithsonian facilities located within the city limits of Washington, D.C. (including the National Zoo).**

Coordination Group (CG) for Winter Weather Public Operations

The CG is a small group of SI leadership who will use weather forecasts and actual conditions information to make timely decisions regarding public operations during winter weather events. Once the CG makes a decision that alters normal operating schedules for public facilities in the National Capital Region (NCR), that information will be disseminated via SI Alerts, Smithsonian Facilities – Help (SF-Help), and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) distribution list. The Office of Public Affairs will notify area media outlets for public distribution.

The members of the CG for Winter Weather Public Operations are:

- Provost/Under Secretary for Museums & Research or his/her designee
- Under Secretary for Finance and Administration or his/her Deputy
- Director, Smithsonian Facilities or his/her Deputy
- Director, Office of Facilities Management and Reliability or his/her Deputy
- Director, Office of Protection Services or his/her Deputy
- Associate Director, Office of Emergency Management

Winter Weather – Public Operations Decision Process and Timeline

- Three days in advance of winter weather - The Initial prediction for the potential of winter weather which could impact public operations of SI facilities shall be forwarded to the OEM Distribution list three days in advance when possible. This information will be included in the “*Situation and Weather Briefing*,” distributed by the Smithsonian Office of Emergency Management (OEM) at a minimum every Monday and Thursday morning. The information will also be highlighted in the email summary of the “*Situation and Weather Briefing*.” If the threat timeline necessitates a change to the routine, a special briefing shall be created and disseminated.
- Daily, in advance of a weather event - Updated forecast information shall be sent via email a minimum of daily if the forecast includes discussion of winter weather impacts in the NCR.

- 3:00 p.m. on the day before weather event – OEM will host a conference call with the members of the CG at 3:00 p.m. the day before the forecasted event is expected to begin. On this call the appropriate Emergency Operations Procedure (EOP) shall be discussed, along with current weather forecasts. Although closures may be discussed, no final decisions will be made during this call.
- 3:00 a.m. on the morning of event - Staff of OEM and SF-Help shall participate in the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (MWCOCG) conference call to gain the latest updates from the National Weather Service (NWS), and expected actions of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regarding the Federal Operating Status of the NCR. SF-Help shall capture and forward minutes to the Smithsonian Facilities, Direct Reports Global e-mail list by 4:00 a.m.
- 4:30 a.m. on the morning of event - OEM will conduct a call with the CG to provide a summary of the results of the MWCOCG conference call, and verify/alter the plans for public operations. The final decision regarding public operations will be made during this call. **REMINDER: All staff who are not considered emergency staff for public operations shall follow the instructions released from OPM. The purpose for the OEM conference calls is to discuss the impacts to public operations of SI facilities.**
- 5:00 a.m. on the morning of event – OEM staff shall send a summary email to the OEM Distribution list and SF – Help staff, if the CG makes the decision to alter operational hours within the NCR. SF – Help will forward the message via SI-Alerts and via a SI-wide email if the normal schedule of NCR public facilities will be altered. The Office of Public Affairs shall notify media outlets.
- At three-hour intervals during the event - Smithsonian Gardens (SG) and the Office of Facilities Management and Reliability (OFMR) personnel shall provide input to SF – Help staff regarding the conditions of the grounds every 3 hours. The staff of SF–Help shall e-mail condition updates to the Facilities, Direct Reports Global e-mail list at three-hour intervals during the day.
- 3:00 p.m. on the afternoon of event –OEM will conduct a Conference call with the members of the CG to provide updates and discuss plans for the upcoming day. The 3:00 p.m., 3:00 a.m., and 4:30 a.m. calls shall continue to be held if the NWS forecast includes any winter weather advisories, watches, or warnings.
- Winter weather events beginning while SI Museums are open – If NCR facilities are open and winter weather threatens to make conditions unsafe, a decision to close early at some or all public facilities may be warranted. If it appears this may be the case, OEM will schedule a conference call with the members of the CG to discuss options and make operational decisions. If public facilities will be closed early, that message will go out via the OEM Distribution list, SI-Alerts and an SI-Wide message.