

Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan



Section 11- Severe Weather/Wildfire Annex

August 2016

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Annex 6 –11 Severe Weather / Wildfire Annex

I. PURPOSE

This plan outlines the procedures to be followed specific to severe weather or wildfire events. Many times severe weather, such as strong thunderstorms and lightening, create or exacerbate wildfires and may also spawn significant tornado activity. Over the years, Horry County has had its share of EOC activation due to the impacts from severe weather and wildfires and this plan includes criteria for heighten awareness and response readiness when conditions warrant. This plan is subordinate to the Horry County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and is to be used in conjunction with each relative section.

II. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

A. Situation

1. Horry County is subject to both severe weather and wildfire outbreaks throughout the year.
2. Severe weather produces such events as extreme heat with high humidity, high winds, hail, snow/ice, heavy rainfall, tornados, flooding or a combination thereof.
3. A large portion of Horry County is forest lands which commonly consists of highly flammable species along with significant areas of residential development resulting in what is known as wildland/urban interface.
4. Damage potential includes uncontrolled burning of grasslands, brush, woodlands, structure fire, flooding and erosion, snow and ice build-up, high winds, lightning strikes, excessively high/low temperatures, diminished public services and communications, damage to or destruction of public and private property, most seriously loss of life.

B. Assumptions

1. Horry County residents can receive notifications of severe weather or wildfire events through local media, NOAA weather radios, or other available government/commercial notification systems.
2. If the damage from severe weather or wildfires is extensive, it may take emergency response personnel hours/days to reach all affected areas.
3. In extreme conditions, Horry County may require State and Federal Assistance
4. Electric power may be most susceptible to damage and at the same time be most essential for recovery.
5. Effective communications may be a major concern due to the disruption of telephone service and the loss or damage of radio antenna towers and related equipment.

6. A significant number of casualties may occur during the post-emergency period from fires, electrocution, stress-related illness, snow/ice/debris-clearing accidents, etc.
7. Both response and recovery operations may be hampered by snow/ice/debris blocked roads, damaged bridges or roads, and downed trees and utility poles.
8. The need for increased security may exist.
9. Demand for resources may be critical.

III. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. Groups and individuals responding to severe weather and wildfire emergencies will do so generally using procedures parallel to the normal day-to-day operations.
2. Early warning statements indicating conditions are favorable for severe weather or fire outbreaks are issued either by the NWS office in Wilmington, NC and/or the SC Forestry Commission. Statements will include detailed descriptions of possible impacts and areas associated with the warning.
3. Additional follow-up warnings may be issued to field staff and key personnel via the Horry County E-911 Communications Center.

B. Specific

1. Severe Weather

- a. As weather statements indicate a possibility for severe weather events, Horry County will make the appropriate preparatory decisions.
- b. NWS weather warning statements typically contain specific impacts which can be used as criteria for a call to action for immediate response or for implementing tasks in support of impending weather conditions (i.e. moving or staging of personnel/equipment, EOC activation, opening of shelters, etc.).
- c. Tornado/Severe Thunderstorm
 - 1) Watch – NWS will issue a tornado/severe storm watch when conditions are favorable for tornado or severe storms to develop.
 - 2) Warning – NWS will issue a tornado severe storm warning when a tornado has been spotted or indicated on radar or when a severe storm with winds of at least 58 MPH and/or hail at least 1” in diameter has developed and most likely will affect the areas stated in the issued bulletin.
 - 3) Actions – Upon receipt of a watch or warning, Emergency Management will ensure the appropriate personnel are aware that a watch or warning has been issued and shall be ready to respond should conditions warrant. Activation of the Emergency Operations Plan may be considered.

d. Ice and Snow

- 1) The NWS will issues early warning statements when local conditions are favorable for a significant snow or icing event. Statements will include the potential impacts and areas that may be affected.
- 2) Actions - Emergency Management will ensure the appropriate personnel are aware that a watch or warning has been issued and shall be ready to respond should conditions warrant. Activation of the Emergency Operations Plan may be considered.

e. Excessive heat and cold temperatures

- 1) The NWS will issue excessive heat watch when conditions are favorable for an excessive heat event in the next 24 to 72 hours and a warning within 12 hours of the onset of extremely dangerous heat conditions.
- 2) The NWS will issue a cold weather alert when conditions are likely to significantly affect people's health. Alerts take into account temperature along with other winter weather threats such as ice and snow.
- 3) Emergency Management will ensure the appropriate personnel are aware that a watch or warning has been issued and shall be ready to respond should conditions warrant. Activation of the Emergency Operations Plan may be considered.
- 4) Warming/Cooling Stations – Due to the land mass of the county, it should not be the practice to arbitrarily open warming/cooling stations without a specific request due to a specific need. Consideration must be given to the number and locations needed verses the resources available to staff and operate the facilities. Other options should first be considered based on practicality and service requests. Emergency Management staff should be prepared to coordinate with the local Red Cross for support to open a warming/cooling facility should there be an extended power outage and location(s) that need to be served can be identified.

2. Wildfire

- a. The SC Forestry Commission and/or the NWS will issue early warning statements regarding the potential for wildfire out-breaks within Horry County.
- b. The National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) observations are used to determine Fire Weather Watch (FWW) and Red Flag statements.
- c. SC Red Flag Fire Alerts and a SC Burn Ban are issued by the SC Forestry Commission when conditions warrant.
- d. Fire Danger Statements are issued by the NWS when fire danger and/or occurrence is high and weather conditions are near critical levels.
- e. Horry County typically issues a Burning Ban in the unincorporated areas of the county once the SC Forestry as issued a Red Flag Alert.

- f. Emergency Management should ensure the appropriate personnel are notified once the NWS and/or SC Forestry Commission has issued a fire statement or Red Flag Alert. Conditions should be monitored and staff should be prepared to respond to an escalation of events. Activation of the Emergency Operations Plan may be considered.

IV. ANNEX MAINTENANCE

Horry County Emergency Management has the responsibility of coordinating, developing and maintaining the Severe Weather/Wildfire Annex and is the designated Lead Agency. The Severe Weather/Wildfire Annex will be updated in conjunction with the CEMP as stated in Section VII, Plan Development and Maintenance.