

Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan



Section 6- Severe Weather/Wildfire Annex

January 2019

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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 lightning, create or exacerbate wildfires and may also spawn significant tornado activity. Over the years, Horry County has had its share of EOC activations due to the impacts from severe weather and wildfires. This plan includes criteria for heightened 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 events like 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 still undeveloped forest lands, which can consist of highly flammable species and access issues. When residential development occurs in proximity to this type of land, the result is 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, and ultimately could result in the 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 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 result following a severe weather event due to fires, electrocution, stress-related illness, snow/ice/debris-clearing accidents, etc.
7. Both response and recovery operations may be impacted 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 the possibility for severe weather events, Horry County will take the appropriate preparatory actions.
- b. NWS weather warning statements indicate potential impacts, which can be used as criteria 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 Wilmington will issue a tornado/severe thunderstorm watch when conditions are favorable for tornado or severe thunderstorm development.
 - 2) Warning – NWS Wilmington will issue a tornado/severe thunderstorm warning when a tornado has been spotted or indicated on radar or when a severe thunderstorm with winds of at least 58 MPH and/or hail at least 1” in diameter has developed and will most likely impact 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 Wilmington will issue early warning statements when local conditions are favorable for winter weather conditions, such as snow or icing. Statements will include the potential impacts and areas that may be impacted.
- 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 Wilmington will issue an 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 Wilmington will issue a cold weather alert when conditions are likely to impact people's health. Alerts take into consideration 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 versus 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 Wilmington will issue early warning statements when conditions are favorable for wildfire outbreaks 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 Wilmington 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. REFERENCES

- a. NWS Wilmington Fire Weather Service Operation Plan 2016

V. 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.