

City of Chicago

2019 Extreme Weather / Temperatures

January 25, 2019 – February 3, 2019

Event Summary

February 2019



Executive Summary

Incident Overview:

Starting Friday, January 25 through Sunday, January 27, 2019, City departments, sister agencies, partner agencies, and non-governmental organizations coordinated efforts to prepare for an imminent extreme weather event. Between Sunday, January 27 and Friday, February 1, the City experienced a snow event followed by a blast of arctic air which brought historic low temperatures and wind chills to northern Illinois and much of the Midwest.

The National Weather Service issued four advisories during this event. A Winter Weather Advisory starting Sunday, January 27, at 9 p.m. through Monday, January 28, at 6 p.m. was later extended through 9 p.m. Monday. On Monday, January 27, a Wind Chill Advisory was issued for Tuesday at 4 a.m. through 6 p.m. In addition to the Advisory, a Wind Chill Watch was issued for 6 p.m. Tuesday through 12 p.m. Thursday. Within two hours, the Wind Chill Watch was replaced by a Wind Chill Warning for the same time period.

Preparedness:

Preparedness efforts began on Friday, January 25, when the Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC) notified key stakeholders of the risk of extreme cold weather for the following week. Coordination continued via conference call on Saturday, January 26, with City of Chicago departments, sister agencies, partner agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector agencies. Following the coordination call, Mayor Rahm Emanuel held a press conference about the impending winter weather events. On Monday, January 28, coordination efforts continued with in-person meetings at the City of Chicago Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

In anticipation of increased operations during the prolonged weather response, the Departments of Streets and Sanitation (DSS), Water Management (DWM), Fire, Fleet and Facility Management (2FM) and Transportation (CDOT) proactively implemented their department-specific extreme weather operations staffing plans. The Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) prepped shelter operations in advance by scheduling adequate staff, contacting volunteer staff and stocking shelters with adequate supplies.

The City's initial response began when DSS activated its Snow Command on Sunday, January 27 to coordinate a snow program, which continued through the morning commute on Monday, January 28. DSS also worked to ensure all roads were treated and cleared prior to the dip in temperatures which began on the evening of Monday, January 28, and continued into the mid-afternoon hours of Tuesday, January 29.

EOC Activation:

OEMC conducted an in-person coordination meeting to discuss the activation of the EOC, examine anticipated agency resource needs, and identify any outstanding issues to be addressed.

On Tuesday, January 29, at 1 p.m., the EOC was activated to provide enhanced operational capabilities and remained open 24 hours-a-day through 1 p.m. Friday, February 1. Daily meetings were held with the leadership of all agencies throughout the activation to ensure a fully coordinated effort.

A total of 33 agencies were engaged during the event. Twelve agencies staffed the EOC for the entire 72-hour incident to ensure that operations were coordinated around the clock. Information sharing, problem-solving and resource allocation were the focus of the EOC activation.

The EOC demobilized at 1 p.m. on Friday, February 1, when the coordination of the recovery phase was turned over to the individual City departments.

Integrated Command, Control and Coordination:

Through the EOC, the City effectively strengthened its communication and coordination among agencies to deploy personnel and resources as needed throughout the period of extreme cold weather. As a result, key stakeholders were

able to manage emergency incidents, address utility outages and provide critical City-services for other weather-related emergencies such as insufficient heat, well-being checks and shelter requests to keep residents safe and warm.

The City implemented its best practice with respect to homeless outreach by utilizing CTA buses as mobile warming centers in cases where residents refused to seek relief indoors. The buses included DFSS staff members who proactively sought out homeless residents to ensure immediate access to food and clothing provisions, as well as CDPH medical personnel to conduct well-being assessments and provide medical care for health-related emergencies.

While the EOC continued focus on the extreme cold, another snow event took place starting Thursday, January 31 through Friday, February 1. During this time, DSS activated the Snow Command in conjunction with the EOC, which ensured enhanced coordination of all programs/responses taking place throughout the city.

Collaborative Messaging:

Ahead of the anticipated extreme weather, OEMC issued a preparedness and precautionary press release on January 25 to inform residents about the upcoming cold/snowy weather and remind the public of available services.

Additionally, the Joint Information Center (JIC) was activated in conjunction with the EOC at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, January 29. Media relations representatives from OEMC, CDPH and DFSS staffed the JIC while the EOC was activated, to communicate timely reports of citywide responses to the City's network of public information officers for public dissemination.

Throughout the week, the City held several press conferences led by Mayor Emanuel and made representatives from OEMC, DFSS, CDPH, DWM, CFD, CPS, CPD, CTA, Park District, Department of Buildings, Department of Aviation, Salvation Army, ComEd and Peoples Gas available to update the public about the City's response and available and services. The events were held on the following dates:

- Saturday, January 26, 11 a.m., at OEMC
- Monday, January 28, 11:15 a.m., at OEMC
- Tuesday, January 29, 11:30 a.m., at Dr. Martin Luther King Service Center
- Wednesday, January 30, 7:45 p.m., at OEMC
- Thursday, January 31, 11 a.m., at Salvation Army Shield of Hope

The Mayor's Office and City departments supported these efforts by leveraging various social media platforms to communicate messages to the public on weather conditions, shelters, and precautionary and protective measures.

As a new practice, OEMC invited local media outlets into its media briefing room to go live on Wednesday and Thursday beginning at 4 a.m. for their morning, mid-day and early evening broadcasts. OEMC and CPDH made their respective department heads available for live studio talk-back interviews, taped interviews and phone interviews on those days to update residents on the City's ongoing response and service efforts.

Conclusion:

Preparing, responding and recovering from an event of this magnitude required a collaborative effort to ensure that all residents of the City of Chicago received the critical services they needed. Over the nine-day period, the City's coordination efforts spanned from the initial preparation phase, to execution of the City of Chicago Emergency Operations Plan, all the way through recovery operations. As the event garnered national attention for days, the City of Chicago's focused coordination efforts and strong inter-agency relationships helped to ensure the safety and security of all City residents, as well as travelers and visitors. The information contained in this summary identifies best practices and provides a snapshot of the City's actions during the preparedness, response, and recovery phases of this emergency, while also illustrating the resilient nature of the City of Big Shoulders even when faced with an extreme weather event of historic magnitude.