



Winter Weather Activation Findings

December 20, 2021 - January 1, 2022



Purpose

The purpose of this Activations Findings document is to capture Joint Emergency Operations Center (EOC) participant observations from the recent winter weather activation event. This document is not an After-Action Report (AAR), and does not include recommended improvements for the initial observations listed. The observations in this document will integrate into a full winter season After-Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR-IP) that will combine multiple Seasonal Activation Findings.

Situation Overview



To prepare for this activation, Multnomah County and the City of Portland initiated a collaborative response, implementing lessons from the Severe Winter Weather in February 2021 and Heat Waves in Summer 2021.

Winter weather planning began well in advance of this round of winter weather. As the forecast for cold temperatures and snow developed, City and County response sections began standing up for this event on December 20. The joint EOC officially opened on December 23.

The first five severe weather shelters opened at 3:00 pm on Saturday, December 25, 2021 under 24-hour operations. Overnight lows in Portland dropped to 32° with a half inch to one inch of snow at low elevations. 164 people sheltered overnight at the five locations.

On Sunday, December 26, a shelter at SE Market Street opened under operation by Transition Projects (TPI) in response to The Portland Building having reached capacity on its first night. Overnight lows dropped to the high 20s. 248 people sheltered overnight at the six locations.

Capacity was expanded on Monday, December 27 through the relocation from the Sunrise Center in Gresham to a larger facility at Reynolds High School in Troutdale, both operated by Cultivate Initiatives. The Sunrise Center had reached capacity on its first night open and additional room was determined to be needed in East County. Temperatures remained below freezing and another 2 to 2.5 inches of snow fell overnight. 339 people sheltered overnight at the six locations.

On the evening of Tuesday, December 28, the Oregon Convention Center was opened as an emergency overflow shelter as guest counts continued to rise. Nighttime lows were again below 30° and snow remained on the ground. 448 people sheltered overnight at the seven locations.

The Oregon Convention Center fully opened on Wednesday, December 29 after enough staff were recruited to fill shifts. Overnight lows again dropped into the 20s. 559 people sheltered overnight at the seven locations.

All shelters, except for Reynolds High School, closed on mid-morning of Thursday, December 30 as temperatures rose into the 40s and melted snow. Overnight lows stayed near 30 degrees with small flurries. Reynolds High School sheltered 65 people.

Colder temperatures returned on Friday, December 31, resulting in three shelters reopening for 24-hour operations. Nighttime lows in Portland dropped to 25°, with slightly colder temperatures in East County. 254 people sheltered at the four locations.

On Saturday, January 1 capacity at the Oregon Convention Center was increased to meet demand from central city guests seeking shelter. Overnight lows again dropped to 25°. 300 people sheltered at the four locations.

All shelters closed at 8am on Sunday, January 2. Overnight temperatures rose into the 30s.

Operational Strengths Observations

Note: The content below is initial operational observations that will be further reviewed during the Full Winter Season After-Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR-IP). These comments should not be considered final recommendations.

1. Unified Command (UC)

- A. Delegation of Responsibilities to Command & General Staff: The activation participants noted an increase in critical decisions being delegated by Unified Command to the relevant EOC Sections and/or positions, utilizing their expertise and improving confidence within EOC positions.
- B. Reduced Size of Unified Command: Participants noted the reduced number of organizations in Unified Command in comparison to the Summer 2021 Extreme Heat events as a strength to this activation.
- C. Joint City/County Unified Command & Operations: The Joint Unified Command between the County & City was an incredible boost to the coordination and support to this activation/response. Participants appreciated that the activation did not separate shelter sites as either “County” or “City” sites - they were approached as a collective responsibility which improved operational and logistical support.

2. Operational Coordination

- A. Response Coordination w/ Partners: Participants noted improved communication and coordination between the City, County, 211, and community organizations than observed in the past.
- B. Pre-Activation Coordination: Participants identified the importance of planning prior to the Winter ‘21/’22 season as a key to improved operations during the activation. The preparation and delivery of initial site resources by the Logistics Section went incredibly well to assist in the opening of each shelter site. The use of Site Set-up Teams improved the opening operations on-site.
- C. Shelter Site Distribution: Participants noted the distribution of shelter sites throughout Multnomah County was critical to support members of the community everywhere.
- D. Accessible Resources On-Site: The purchase of wheelchairs and walkers showed a focus on the mobility challenges, and the purchase of car seats demonstrated there was a focus on families and their safety.
- E. Fire Department Support: The Fire Department staff performed outreach to those who remained outside, taking supplies directly from the shelters into the field.

3. Public Information

- A. Regional PIO Coordination: Public Information Officers coordinated daily check-ins for communications and messaging operations across the Portland Metropolitan Region. These meetings shared content, messaging strategy, photos, etc.
- B. Partner Engagement: The EOC PIO Team distributed operational updates directly to community partners, building the Common Operating Picture and ensuring key messaging were widely shared.
- C. Flyer Distribution: Flyers were created so that warming shelter information could be distributed physically, not just electronically, and in multiple languages.

4. Planning Section

- A. IAP Template Documents: The Planning Section was able to utilize the template Incident Action Plan (IAP) resource from previous activations, such as the Summer 2021 Extreme Heat Activation, to streamline Section responsibilities during this activation.
- B. Situation Report Improved Data Integration: Participants noted improvements in data collection and Situation Report development. The EOC gathered different data points to build an effective Common Operating Picture for the incident. Examples included the Logistics Section tracking incoming resource requests, number of transportations requested and completed, and the breakdown of requests by shelter location. Participants encouraged this emphasis on data should be maintained throughout the EOC organizational structure, and may should be added to a Unit Lead/Deputy Position.

5. Logistics Section

- A. Separation of responsibility between the Ground Support Strike Teams: The two strike teams (passengers and materials) were able to staff themselves and allowed for the Team Leads to focus on strategic prioritization.
- B. Vehicle Sharing System: The Logistics Staff were able to utilize vehicles from either fleet services (County or City), which provided opportunities to complete the expected responsibilities more efficiently and increased the number and type of vehicles available for use.
- C. Ground Support Unit (Passengers) Coordination Tool Development: A daily schedule and data spreadsheet was developed by the Ground Support Unit that assisted with coordination and information management. This tool was vital in managing the workflow and keeping relevant partners organized (211, dispatchers, Logistics Ground Support Unit).
- D. Accessible-Equipped Transportation Vehicles: Utilizing vehicles for passenger transportation equipped with lifts for mobility devices improved the Ground Support Units effectiveness, especially for passengers who used carts to transport their personal belongings.

- E. Free Transportation to Shelter Sites: Free rides were provided to and from shelter locations as the EOC opened locations around the county, expanding the scope of individuals able to access the resources.

6. Administration Section

- A. Pre-Event Messaging: Participants noted they received more consistent messaging for support prior to activation, with several messages coming out encouraging them to help where they could. Participants were especially proud of the EOCs sense of urgency, call to action, and both internal and external messaging.

Areas for Consideration During Future Activations

Note: The content below is initial operational observations that will be further reviewed during the Full Winter Season After-Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR-IP). These comments should not be considered operational areas for improvement.

1. Command & General Staff

- A. Availability During an Activation: Operations Section Leadership was limited in its engagement/strategic planning with other Sections. This impacted the ability to troubleshoot ongoing issues and address a strategic vision for response. The Operations Section Lead position saw limited rotation. This notes a challenge for working within an Incident Command System structure when the IC/UC or another Section Leads are expected to communicate to more than one individual.
- B. EOC Shift Briefings, Virtually & In-Person: Virtual EOC participants noted waiting extended periods of time for direction on their assignment and limited contact from, or with, their identified point of contact. Some participants expressed concern they were not provided a point of contact for their work assignments regularly.

In-person EOC/ECC participants expressed support for operational site team meetings and/or briefings, however they noted shifts with no incoming briefing which then saw participants unsure of their assignments.
- C. Demobilization Planning & Operations: There is no established process to perform demobilization operations. There is currently no lead to coordinate the demobilization operations which made it unclear who was performing what responsibility during demobilization. The demobilization efforts had limited guidance documentation for expected actions. Some specific demobilization comments included:
 - I. Cleaning shelter sites during demobilization was not easy to execute with the checklists provided.
 - II. EMT staff shared they felt personnel resources provided to sites did not match the demand following site closure.
 - III. Participants noted the guidance for what to do with the flooring/ram board was not clear.

Closing shelters with not enough notice towards the end of this incident caused mistrust and challenges for shelter workers. Participants shared they believe the number of shelter workers dropped because of the one-day closure. Participants expressed concern about contributing to guest stress by displacing individuals who

felt they could count on the warming centers to support them throughout the cold weather.

2. Operations

- A. Shower Availability: Participants felt not having showers accessible at the Mt Scott Community Center communicated to our guests that they were not worthy of using resources that their housed neighbors are able to access almost any other day. The location also only opened one male and one female bathroom (2 stalls each) while leaving the other bathroom closed. This was inadequate for the volume of guests plus staff.
- B. Behavioral Health Support: Participants in the Operations Section noted receiving calls overnight for behavioral health resource support they were unclear how to address (ex. guests that weren't being successful in the congregate environment and required transportation elsewhere). Clear guidance for persons-in-charge was provided during the build-up to this incident to call the ESF #6 Lead for help, however ESF #6 was not knowledgeable with how to acquire behavioral health support. Calls to County Behavioral Health for assistance were confusing as there were several phone numbers provided.
- C. Language Accessibility & Services: Participants were not familiar with the language services available to them at the shelters. Participants noted that during the County training they were taught about the availability of language boards (which they did not see), and in the TPI training they were taught about the use of language cards for assisting with language barriers (also not available during this activation). Previous activations utilized Library translation devices, whereas this activation participants noted only the language line as a resource. Participants noted they were not familiar with the use of integrating language services (language line and ASL VRI).
- D. Shelter Expectations & Training: Information and protocol understanding by persons-in-charge at shelters was not consistent. Examples included:
 - I. Food & Laundry Services: Provided Example: one persons-in-charge was guided to throw away all delivered food and dirty blankets, another stated they saved all left behind clothing, sleeping bags, and blankets for laundry services and called ESF #6 regarding leftover food prior to throwing it away).
 - II. Safety Protocols: Some shelter sites had guests sleep with N95s masks on, while others had guests sleep with no masks.
 - III. Turn-Away Policy: Some sites had a "turn no-one away policy," others were turning guests away.

Participants noted additional training would benefit shelter persons-in-charge and general staff. They felt the shelters were disorganized and even unsafe at times due to limited training. They noted there was not always enough trained staff, which resulted in using untrained staff for important positions

- E. Distribution and Inventory of Supplies On-Site: Participants discussed the need for additional guidance regarding the distribution of supplies to guests. Participants learned of individuals taking advantage of the consistent availability of supplies. The

consistent requests for additional supplies was putting a strain on the Logistics Section to keep up with the demand that was created. Supplies that are set aside for routine outreach were used because of the huge distribution of materials, requiring additional workload by staff to re-supply those resources. Food resources, clothing, and other supplies available at the shelter all were distributed quickly following shelter opening.

The use of a supply inventory was a challenge during this activation. Persons-in-charge expected to have every item listed on the inventory at the listed amount, although inventory lists are not currently accurate and specific to shelter locations and/or trailer/pod storage.

It was challenging for persons-in-charge to find time to conduct on-site inventory due to the other responsibilities their position holds. And the dual requests for information from both Logistics and the ESF #6 Leads created confusion around the resource request process.

3. Logistics Section

- A. Resource Management Process: With no purchasing and/or ordering guidance the Logistics Team felt unsure which items were approved for purchase. The Logistics Section was assigned the role of approving and denying resource requests during this activation. Some requests required additional feedback from the Logistics Section to fulfill the need.

There also is not an established resource management process for this activation. The process was built ad-hoc. The process worked okay for this scope of an incident, however there was only one or two Emergency Support Functions activated during this incident. This approach to resource management would create significant issues during a major incident.

The communication between the Operations and Logistics Teams could be clarified with the resource process. There are two consistent ongoing conversations - #1 Logistics □ Operations to address supply/material strategic vision and strategy, and #2 – Logistics □ Persons-in-Charge to coordinate additional supply needs. These conversations began to blend together and were at times redundant.

The Logistics Section needs to consider how resource requests are addressed internally to the Section. Without a designated Resource Request position, the Ground Support Unit Lead and Supply Unit were spending a lot of time searching through requests rather than supporting the management of procurement and delivery.

- B. City/County IT Systems Interoperability: Participants noted a hindrance to interoperability between City and County IT systems (Teams vs Google) and challenges for non-County staff using Google suite (the identified system of use). The activation use of the Google Platform (Google Docs and sheets), required incident personnel to spend significant time providing access and system education for those not familiar. City staff did not always have consistent access to the incident folder(s) and documents had to be sent manually.

Because the County uses Google and the City uses Microsoft, it is often difficult to collaborate online for City and County personnel (ex. there is no common "chat" or file sharing).

- C. Ground Support Unit Staffing: Ground Support Unit staffing was unable to rotate effectively during the response, and the extended duration event demonstrated an inability to maintain that staffing.
- D. Guest Transportation Process: Participants expressed concern regarding the time it takes between requesting a ride and actual pick-up. There were many rides requested as the Ground Support Unit was developing a new strategy for transporting guests to shelters. The Ground Support Unit should continue to develop a more diverse workforce amongst the drivers and ride along partners.
- E. Food Services: There was a consistent story of foods being delivered cold as transportation was being conducted by single organizations. The EOC Logistics Section did begin to support the food vendors with deliveries to reduce the burden.

4. Administration Section

- A. Shelter Attendance: The Administration Section noted it was challenging to have direct contact on site to collect shelter attendance information. Individual phone calls were made to people staffing the shelters rather than directly to an ESF #6 or the person-in-charge.
- B. Shelter Closing Notification to Staff: Participants noted positive messaging about the staffing support needs during the build-up to activation, however they felt there was not enough messaging regarding the closure of sites and how it impacts them.
- C. Volunteer Deployment Support: Volunteers expressed concern they were not always clear on who to check in with or what the scope of work was, making the response seem less organized to them.
- D. Registration System: EOC participants provided feedback regarding the registration process, listed below:
 - I. Personal Shift Tracking: Participants noted neither EOC or shelter shifts would translate from the Sign-Up Genius to individual calendars, making it challenging to track individual shifts.
 - II. Non-Employee Registration Messaging: Non-employees informed participants that the sign-up genius felt geared toward employees and were not sure if they should sign up with it. Was there a better place to invite public volunteers?
 - III. County Employee Messaging Content: Participants noted the County sign up message information and links did not include consistent information. It was challenging to search through multiple links and/or attachments that answered important questions. Participants noted the messaging had differing sign-up slots.
 - IV. Shift Registration Expectation: Participants noted confusion about how to make sure they were signed up for shifts, there was conflicting guidance

between emailing the Section Lead or using Sign-Up Genius. Many people just showed up or emailed the Section Lead rather than using the Sign-Up Genius.

- V. **Manager Support:** Participants would like to see more support from Supervisors/Management for participants to activate with the EOC.
- VI. **Incentive Program:** Participants requested a clear definition of what qualifies as a "shift". The Sign-Up Genius had multiple shifts listed that lasted 4.5 hours, while others were listed at 10 hours, and participants were unsure what was considered a full shift. Participants requested the communications promoting shifts to be clear that any bonus extends to all positions and not just shelters.

5. Safety Officer

- A. **Shelter Safety:** Participants requested more focus on keeping activation staff safe who have been exposed to potentially harmful substances, materials, fluids, and bugs. While loading up used blankets from a shelter site, Logistics Drivers were exposed to fecal matter & bedbugs without guidance.

Participants worked in shelter sites following blankets, bedding, and other materials being collected that had likely not been thoroughly cleaned. Participants were curious about the vender/pick-up process for professionally cleaning – bringing those supplies directly to the Logistics Warehouse places workers at risk of bed bugs, biohazards, and needles.

Other Comments/Considerations

The following are general comments provided by the participants for subject matter experts to consider. These comments were not specific strengths or areas for consideration.

1. **Shelter Messaging (Health Officer):** Be careful about referring to winter shelters as life-saving. We are presumably housing a fraction of people living outside, with few to zero reported hypothermia deaths.
2. **Staffing Agency Use:** Obtaining staff from temporary staffing agencies does not seem to be a good idea. They have less training and require more supervision.
3. **Logistics Site Liaisons:** Staff requested Logistics Site Liaisons make their comeback at shelter locations. Their shifts could overlap with the outgoing and incoming PICs, and they could show the incoming PIC the location of supplies, and place (and clarify) orders with Logs for needed supplies. They could assist with demobilization by providing PICs with clear instructions on how to demobilize.
4. **Volunteering Time as Employee:** Staff expressed interest in the option to volunteer their time as well as work. Trying to figure out how to track my time and complete timecards was challenging, and it took more of my manager's time than I would have hoped.
5. **Utilizing Guest Assistance:** Participants expressed interest in using guests to be trained and paid to provide some of the services that are currently being paid at overtime rates for (with another 30% incentive).

Activation Findings

Winter Weather Activation: December 2021/January 2022

6. Public Information Considerations: Does the Public Information Team or EOC have a strategy to reach people without access to the internet? E.g. mailers with basic key information and link to number/ website where they can find more information or posters placed at local super markets/libraries and community center.