



Photo: Seattle Department of Transportation

Winter Weather Response

Emergency Operations Center Activation (Virtual)

December 2021 – January 2022

After Action Report & Improvement Plan



Seattle

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Activation Overview

Event Type: Severe Cold & Snow

Activation Type: Virtual

Timeline: December 22, 2021 – January 3, 2022

The National Weather Service (NWS) issued a forecast for an extreme cold event with widespread snow for the Puget Sound region over several days beginning December 25 and lasting into the new year. Significant snowfall accumulation was expected (2 to 8 inches cumulatively) from a series of storm systems, coinciding with a period of extreme, below-average temperatures.

The City of Seattle Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activated virtually to provide coordination and support for response operations by departments/agencies and to minimize impacts to community members, vulnerable populations, and particularly those experiencing homelessness. This was the second virtual activation in 2021 for winter weather, and the third in 2021 for extreme weather.

The two primary operational coordination points during this event were snow management and emergency weather sheltering. Snow management was led by the Seattle Department of Transportation with support from several departments. Coordination of sheltering for unhoused residents of Seattle was led by the Seattle Human Services Department in partnership with the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) for the duration of the event. KCRHA will serve as the lead for events after January 1, 2022.

State Mission Number:	Coordination Calls & SnapShot Reports:	Coordination Call Schedule:
#21-4968	9	Twice Daily Dec 26-27 2021 Daily Dec 29 2021 – Jan 1 2022; Jan 3 2022

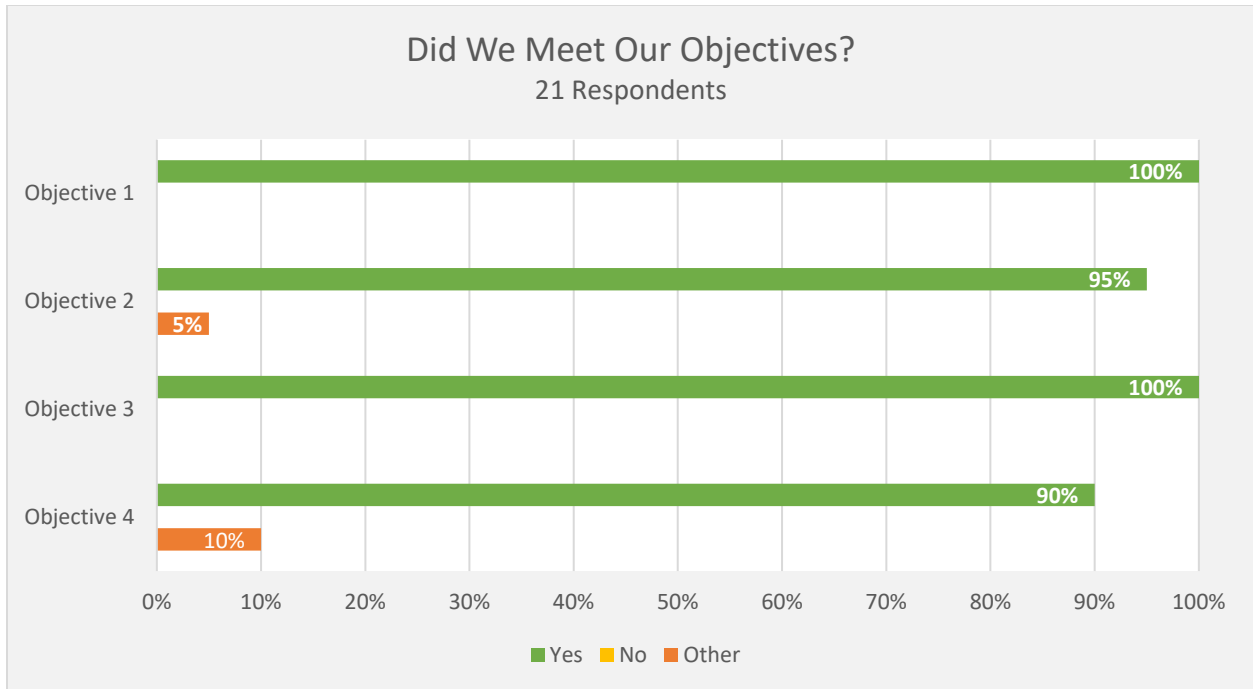
EOC Consolidated Action Plan Objectives

The City's overall objectives for this event were:

- Objective 1: Maintain situational awareness on current and forecasted impacts to City.
- Objective 2: Coordinate support for the community (severe weather shelters, general population shelters, utilities, health, etc.)
- Objective 3: Coordinate actions and resources to maintain City Services including public safety.
- Objective 4: Ensure coordinated and consistent messaging with the community, stakeholders, and employees.

After the weather event ended, a survey was sent to EOC responders and other emergency management partners. The survey asked respondents to evaluate the EOC's Consolidated Action Plan, objectives, and operations, as well as provide information about their department activities for this activation. Results from the survey are included below and used to inform the AAR and IP.

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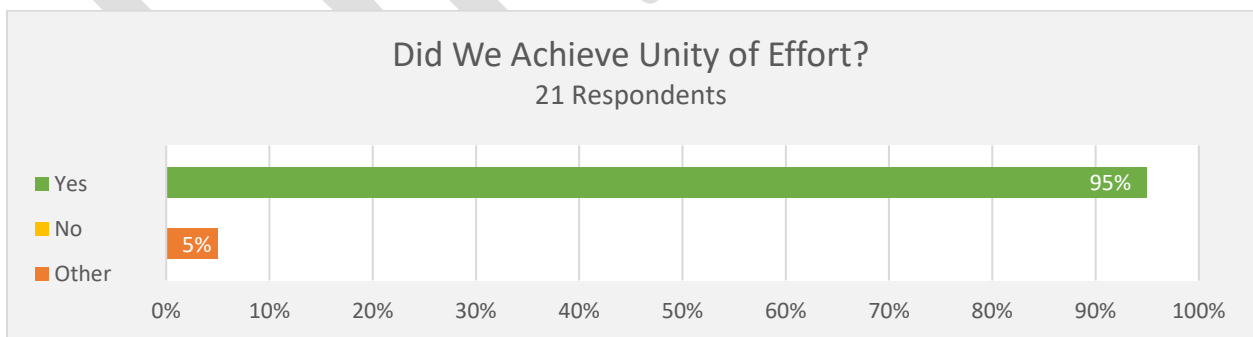


Responder Comments (“Other”):

“I felt like we could have improved these objectives to make them more specific to the actual event. These are so generic they are hard to evaluate.”

“OEM distributed the information provided, however in some instances at the departmental level, clarity of the purpose of the messaging could have been better fleshed out with mindfulness to center the actual users of services (and responders).”

“Could improve sharing messaging and materials across agencies, maybe with a central form or hub for input by a certain time every day.”



Responder Comments (“Other”):

“From EOC activation to Department wide coordination there was a gap in unity of effort without clear understanding of situational awareness where several issues erupted with ongoing issues about objective and thus priorities.”

Departments, Organizations, and Agencies Represented in the Virtual EOC

- Seattle Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS)
- City of Seattle Communications Center (CSCC)
- Seattle Center
- Seattle City Light (SCL)
- Seattle Department of Human Resources (SDHR)
- Seattle Department of Neighborhoods
- Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)
- Seattle Finance and Administrative Services (FAS)
- Seattle Fire Department (SFD)
- Seattle Human Services Department (HSD)
- Seattle Information Technology Department (ITD)
- Seattle Joint Information Center (JIC)
- Seattle Mayor's Office
- Seattle Office of Economic Development
- Seattle Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
- Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR)
- Seattle Police Department (SPD)
- Seattle Public Libraries (SPL)
- Seattle Public Utilities (SPU)
- Sound Transit
- King County Metro
- King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA)
- Northwest Healthcare Response Network (NWHRN)
- National Weather Service
- Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC)

Pre-Event Coordination

OEM began monitoring the weather forecast several days ahead of the storm's arrival as the NWS forecasts became increasingly confident that a prolonged period of extreme cold and snow would impact Seattle late December and into January.

This weather event coincided with two major holidays, Christmas and New Year's Eve/Day. Significant operational coordination took place before the event between operational departments and regional partners. A surge in COVID-19 Omicron infections throughout the region also occurred during this period.

An initial Coordination Call was held on December 22 to discuss the forecast and response readiness actions. Coordination of staffing support, particularly for additional Commercial Driver's License holders, began between SDOT and other departments, including SPU, SPR, and SCL. Operational departments outlined plans to remove snow and support city operations while staffing was reduced due to holiday and sick leave.

HSD identified two initial sites for overnight sheltering to open on the evening of December 25 (Seattle Center Exhibition Hall and Compass Housing Alliance) in collaboration with KCRHA, which was scheduled to assume emergency sheltering responsibilities for unhoused people on January 1, 2022.

OEM began creating a Joint Information Center (JIC) staffing plan on December 20 in anticipation of emergency messaging needs and media coverage of response. The Mayor's Communications team coordinated citywide press releases about storm preparation information, including city response activities protective actions for the public. The city also held a press conference on December 23 to present the planned city response to the forecasted weather and outline protective actions for residents and businesses.

An AlertSeattle message was sent to over 57,000 subscribers advising them of the hazardous weather forecast and protective actions to take before and during the severe weather event.

On December 24, in anticipation of potential staffing shortages and to aid response, Mayor Durkan issued a Proclamation of Civil Emergency and an Emergency Civil Order authorizing incentive pay for all frontline City of Seattle workers opting-in to help staff emergency warming and winter weather shelters.

Departments activated their winter weather response plans to ensure city services and sites would be safe and operational as appropriate, and any closures or service impacts due to weather conditions would be communicated to the public. Departments pre-staged assets and resources as available, and pre-treated surfaces when possible.

Operational Response Overview

The Emergency Operations Center activated virtually beginning Sunday, December 26 at 7:00 am, following several days of pre-event coordination. The EOC remained virtually activated through December 28, and coordination calls continued through January 3.

Beginning the late evening of December 25 and early morning of December 26, the city received 3-4 inches of snow, and a series of smaller storms brought an additional 2-4 inches over the course of the next several days. Temperatures reached below average and hazardous lows beginning on December 25

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and remained extremely cold into the new year. Temperatures returned to above-freezing during the daytime by January 3, but in many areas, there was re-freezing overnight, which continued to impact residential roads.

Road and Snow Management

Several challenges impacted snow management operations, including staffing availability and weather conditions. The timing and type of precipitation also created challenges, as rain ahead of the snow limited SDOT's ability to pre-treat roads. Additionally, extended below-freezing temperatures after the initial snowfall meant that little-to-no snow melting occurred for several days, and any daytime melting quickly refroze overnight, exacerbating hazardous conditions.

Once conditions allowed, SDOT began plowing operations in addition to other tactics according to the SDOT Winter Weather Readiness and Response plan (WWRR). As part of the WWRR plan snow clearance crews were supplemented by SCL, SPR, and SPU staff with Commercial Drivers Licenses and appropriate training. Additionally, SDOT crews cleared all 15 protected bike lanes in the city and thousands of curb ramps to assist in pedestrian and cyclist mobility.

Beginning Sunday December 26th, Street Use inspectors inspected 10,446 sidewalk segments identified in the WWRR plan. Street Use inspectors also distributed multi-lingual flyers to communication the need for adjacent business and property owners to clear their sidewalks in the International District.

SDOT and supporting operational departments worked with Seattle Public Schools, Seattle Public Libraries, COVID-19 testing and vaccination site partners, and other critical partners to clear ice and snow from roads, parking lots, and sidewalks at those sites as crews became available.

The accumulation of snow, especially on residential roads, led to suspension of SPU's solid waste collection service across the city for several days. Some steep residential streets were closed to traffic for safety reasons. Transfer stations were available for the public to bring solid waste in the absence of scheduled pickup. Solid waste pickup resumed Monday, January 3.

FAS fleet shops operated on a 24-hour schedule closely coordinating with SDOT to prioritize equipment needs. FAS-managed facilities received preventative supply of deicer and snowplow services. During the snow event building perimeters and parking lots were plowed, de-iced, and access points kept free of snow and ice as much as possible. Based on observations and feedback, signage was placed to make tenants and pedestrians aware of winter weather conditions. Property Managers were available 24/7 during the event to manage vendors and tenant point of contacts.

Emergency Sheltering and Transportation for Unhoused Residents

Emergency overnight sheltering sites opened across the city starting on December 25, beginning with two sites in the downtown area (Seattle Center Exhibition Hall and Compass Housing Alliance) and eventually expanding to six sites around the city, including North Seattle and West Seattle (West Seattle American Legion Post 160, Seattle City Hall, God's Lil Acre, and the Seattle Mennonite Church). At the peak of capacity for overnight shelter at these sites, 379 bed spaces were available. Across the full event 2,116 overnight stays were provided. These sites operated through January 3, 2022.

As this event occurred during the anticipated January 1, 2022 transition of the severe sheltering response lead from HSD to the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA), a decision was

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made for HSD to remain the lead for this event and work closely with KCRHA to coordinate efforts and facilitate the provision of services.

Severe weather event warming centers were also opened at five SPR Community Centers, Seattle City Hall, and the Seattle Center Armory. Some library sites were open, but their availability was significantly impacted day-to-day by staffing challenges.

Transportation to these sites became challenging, especially as snow reduced the availability of public transit and ADA accessible transit options. SPR offered the use of transport vans, and SPD Community Service Officers provided assistance transporting unhoused people to shelters during the storm.

To support staffing shortages and operational constraints for shelter providers due to COVID-19, Mayor Durkan signed an emergency order on December 24 to provide monetary incentives for frontline workers and human service providers staffing emergency shelters and warming centers. In response to the Mayor's call for added staff support, 171 City employees opted into this surge staffing effort, with 18 employees eventually deployed in support of warming shelters and centers or assisting with transportation efforts over seven days. This program was largely developed on the fly immediately prior to and during the event, with input from the Mayor's Office, HSD, and the Seattle Department of Human Resources.

During the inclement weather, HSD's HOPE Team coordinated outreach and shelter referrals into the City's temporary severe weather shelters, and other City-funded shelters, in partnership with contracted outreach providers. The HOPE Team, in coordination with Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR), Seattle Fire Department's Health One, and Seattle Police Department's Community Service Officers, conducted welfare visits, shared information on emergency shelters, provided transportation to warming centers and shelter, and supported efforts to distribute weather supplies including handwarmers, socks, emergency blankets, hats, and gloves.

Over the course of the winter weather response, the HOPE Team and SPR outreach to unsheltered neighbors resulted in at least:

- 319 conversations about severe weather shelters
- 189 people receiving winter weather supplies
- 30 rides to warming shelters
- 51 referrals to temporary severe weather shelters
- 36 referrals to permanent shelters (December 22 – January 3)

Outreach teams and shelter workers observed that some unhoused people were reluctant to come inside to shelters, including day and overnight shelters, because they were either not 24-hour operations or because there was no food, water, or hygiene services available at the sites.

HSD Aging and Disability Services also contacted case managed clients who were at high risk during this event and helped address unmet critical needs. Throughout the event, HSD communicated services and resources through social media, provider networks, and a range of other strategies to reach vulnerable populations.

FAS teams distributed PPE and other supplies as requests were received through WebEOC, supported the warming center and overnight shelter at Seattle City Hall, and coordinated with SPR to provide pet

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supplies and food at warming centers. COVID outbreaks at multiple sheltering sites required significant janitorial and hygiene response, and the outbreaks impacted city staff well after the end of sheltering operations.

An online map of Seattle shelter and warming sites was created by ITD in coordination with OEM, HSD, SPR, and SPL which displayed warming center locations and their hours of availability across the city. The data for the map was maintained daily based on input from lead agencies for each site. After consultation with accessibility experts in the city, a text-based version of the map was also created. This map was shared with the public as well as responders in the field. There was a brief period when the shelter and SDOT plow maps were not available due to an issue with the mapping vendor's systems. The problem was solved by ITD in coordination with the vendor, and a workaround solution has been identified if the problem occurs again.

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Improvement Plan Items

The Improvement Plan captures coordination and activities conducted during the operation that should be sustained, documented, and incorporated into plans and training, as well as areas for improvement where additional planning and training should be conducted. The Improvement Plan will be tracked by the Office of Emergency Management as part of the City of Seattle’s emergency management program.

IP #	Observation/Issue Statement	Improvement Action	Lead	Support	Completion Date
2022-1	The Consolidated Action Plan and objectives outlined within it were generic and did not capture objectives specific to this event.	Review the existing Consolidated Action Plan template and development process; incorporate objective review and refinement into Planning Section activities during an ongoing activation; ensure CAP objectives reflect equity in response coordination	OEM	Strategic Working Group	June 30, 2022
2022-2	MS Teams: Opportunities to refine processes and procedures for virtual activations via MS Teams: Sign in/out, external partner access, reducing duplication and confusion	Apply responder feedback to improve MS Teams processes and procedures and formalize ad hoc processes and procedures within Teams setup, documentation, user guidance	OEM	ITD	March 30, 2022
2022-3	Staffing shortages led to a need for shared staffing resources among departments with Commercial Drivers License (CDL) holders beyond what is currently planned for	Develop and implement a plan to expand number of CDL drivers trained across the city; ensure plans capture full scope of CDL needs and prioritization; ensure responders are trained in NIMS and city response plans	SDOT ESF-1	SPU SCL SPR FAS	June 30, 2023
2022-4	New staff not NIMS trained, which led to confusion about operational roles and overall department emergency plans among operational staff	Develop and implement a plan to mandate/provide NIMS and department emergency plan training; increase city staff available to deliver training	SDOT SPU OEM	Strategic Working Group, Mayor’s Office	June 30, 2023

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2022-5	Mapping: Inconsistent data availability, formatting, collection and input led to decreased accuracy and timeliness of mapped shelter resources	Establish standards and processes for EEIs/data input into maps	ITD	OEM	January 31, 2022
2022-6	Mapping: Default GIS map settings and display are not Section 508 compliant, leading to access issues for people with disabilities	Create a mapping workflow that includes creation of text-only or otherwise accessible versions of mapped information; ensure map displays meet standards of accessibility for people with colorblindness; train GIS staff and PIOs in these processes and requirements	ITD	OEM	June 30, 2022
2022-7	Surge staffing: Due to provider capacity and City staff constraints due to COVID-19 and holiday leave, sheltering and transportation operations faced a severe staffing shortage for a prolonged sheltering event. HSD implemented a surge staffing plan using city staff who volunteered to work in shelters and transport	Create a policy and standard operating procedure for surge staffing; explore the possibility to pre-identify interested staff, train staff in potential support roles and develop just-in-time training for redeployed staff	SDHR Mayor's Office	HSD SDOT SPR	June 30, 2023
2022-8	People who were unsheltered were reluctant to leave established outdoor spaces and personal belongings for temporary overnight only shelter accommodations or warming centers with limited food and hygiene services	Explore with KCRHA barriers for day and night shelters and approaches to address the barriers.	HSD	SPR	September 30, 2022
2022-9	Shelter outreach: JIC-level communication of sheltering information was disjointed and not always optimized for the intended audience/population	Conduct an audience needs analysis to determine the most effective methods of communicating emergency sheltering information to various audiences referring to this information (public messaging vs. internal user messaging)	HSD OEM	JIC	June 30, 2022

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2022-10	There was not an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter at the pre-event press conference	Train communications and PIO staff to plan for and request ASL interpreters; reinforce this in JIC training	JIC OEM	Mayor's Office	April 30, 2022
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