

Don't blow it!

by Tanya Crites

Even though Washington State does not experience some of the severe winter weather the rest of our country does, we do experience strong windstorms that can cause building damage, interrupt power or other public services and take down trees and branches. WCIA members who prepare for windstorms in advance can minimize damage to owned facilities and public rights-of-way, and minimize interruption of services to the public.

The first step in preparing for a windstorm is developing a comprehensive written emergency plan, which may include the following:

- Determine the emergency, contact for the agency and who will coordinate with county, state, regional emergency groups and local utility providers.
- Determine emergency contacts in each agency department. Assign duties and responsibilities and provide annual training.
- Assign a person to monitor and report changing weather conditions.
- Identify and train essential employees on duties in emergency response. Ensure essential employees have supplies (e.g., extra set of warm clothing, water, food)
- Provide essential employees with time off prior to the event to prepare homes/families.
- Determine under what conditions agency buildings will be closed or delayed opening.
- Determine how best to notify the public and employees of interruption of agency services or building closures (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, local news, email or phone tree, posted signs).
- Assemble emergency supplies and equipment in a safe location for employees, and possibly for community needs.
- Prioritize resumption of services to the public (i.e., restoration of utilities, public transportation, access to agency facilities, clearing streets, parks).
- Inspect agency buildings and repair roofs with loose flashing, drains, gutters, downspouts, etc.
- Secure equipment and supplies that are normally stored outside.
- Anchor large equipment.
- Test all emergency generators.
- Ensure vehicles and fuel powered equipment are fully fueled.
- Remove trees and branches that are identified as potentially perilous, especially if damage or injury could result if the trees or branches should fall.
- Clear storm drains and catch basins.
- Prepare for flooding streets and buildings (i.e., street closure supplies, sandbags, evacuation plan).

- Be prepared to safely shut down operations if necessary.
- Review and/or revise plan annually, or as needed.

Designing and implementing a windstorm emergency plan is a risk management tool that can help WCIA members avoid or minimize losses and provide better services to the public before, during and after a windstorm. For members that already have an emergency plan in place, it is important that the plan is updated when designated contacts, essential personnel or decision makers change.