

TEXAS A&M TASK FORCE ONE STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES

SEVERE WEATHER OPERATIONS

VOLUME 1

REFERENCE NO. 1-25

1.00 PURPOSE

- 1.01 The purpose of this document is to outline procedures meant to safeguard the health and safety of Task Force members during severe weather events, and to minimize preventable weather-related incidents to personnel, vehicles, and equipment.

2.00 OBJECTIVE

- 2.01 This policy applies to all team members and supporting staff during mobilizations, deployments, and exercises.

3.00 DEFINITIONS

- 3.01 **Severe Weather:** Any meteorological condition (thunderstorms, high winds, hurricanes, tornadic activity, floods, fog, excessive heat or cold/freezing condition) that pose a threat to team safety.
- 3.02 **Severe Weather Warning** – weather conditions that pose a threat to life or property.
- 3.03 **Severe Weather Watch** - conditions are favorable for the development of severe weather in and near the watch area.
- 3.04 **NIOSH** - National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, a U.S. federal agency that researches and provides recommendations to prevent work-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths, operating under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- 3.05 **Suspension of Operations:** Temporary halt of outdoor operations and/or vehicular movement due to dangerous weather.
- 3.06 **Dynamic Water:** Water that is moving but not flowing over 3 mph (walking pace).
- 3.07 **30/30 Rule for Lightning Safety:** Count the time between observing the lightning and hearing the thunder. If the time span is 30 seconds or less, 30 minutes must pass before resuming activities.

4.0 GENERAL GUIDELINES

- 4.01 Weather conditions should be monitored using National Weather Service (NWS)/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) forecasts and alerts, as well as local sources. Weather conditions/forecasts should be briefed at the beginning of each operational period or more frequently as conditions warrant.
- 4.02 If during an operational period a threat of severe weather is forecasted or develops, the Safety Officer and TFL will be notified. The Safety Officer will activate the appropriate severe weather response protocol and will notify team managers. Managers/Squad Officers should ensure compliance and report personnel accountability.
- 4.03 If conditions require suspension of operations, the Safety Officer will notify the TFL and managers.
- 4.04 Severe Weather Thresholds & Actions

1. High Winds

- Suspend outdoor work involving elevated activities (ladders, lifts, rooftops) when sustained winds are ≥ 25 mph or gusts exceed 35 mph.
- Cease all outdoor operations if sustained winds are ≥ 35 mph or gusts exceed 45 mph.
- **Vehicular Travel:**
- For 18-wheelers/Box Trucks: suspend travel when sustained winds are ≥ 30 mph or gusts > 40 mph.
- For vans/pickups: Suspend travel when sustained winds are ≥ 40 mph or gusts > 50 mph. This also applies when transporting trailers.
- If wind conditions below the above listed parameters cause hazardous driving conditions, the operator may choose to suspend travel.

2. Lightning

- Suspend all outdoor operations if lightning or thunder is observed within 10 miles of the area of operations. If no other source of information is available, the 30/30 rule can be used to determine lightning distance.
- Move personnel indoors or into hard-topped vehicles when possible.
- Do not resume operations until “All Clear” is issued by Safety Officer.

3. Floods/Flash Floods

- Consider suspending all operations in areas under a flash flood warning.
- Do not attempt to drive vehicles through dynamic water at a depth greater than the center line of the vehicle’s wheel hub.
- Do not operate HPVs in water > 30 inches deep.

- Relocate personnel and vehicles to higher ground as directed.

4. **Hurricane/Tropical Storm**

- Suspend all outdoor operations and vehicle movement when sustained winds reach ≥ 35 mph.
- Prepare for possible evacuation to designated shelter-in-place locations or withdrawal as directed.

5. **Tornado**

- On issuance of NWS tornado warning or visual confirmation, immediately shelter personnel inside nearest safe structure (interior rooms, basements, away from windows).
- Report PAR for all personnel.

6. **Extreme Heat**

- Implement NIOSH/OSHA recommended work/rest cycles based on Wet Bulb Globe Temp (WBGT) readings and actual site conditions.
- Increase hydration and shade breaks.
- Alter work/rest cycles or consider suspending operations when Heat Index $\geq 103^{\circ}\text{F}$ or per NIOSH/OSHA Heat Stress Guidelines.

7. **Dense Fog/Smoke**

- Suspend non-essential travel if visibility is $< \frac{1}{4}$ mile (per DOT guidelines).
- Use emergency flashers/pull off roadway safely if necessary.

8. **Freezing Conditions/Ice**

- If ice conditions are present, suspend elevated outdoor operations until surfaces are clear.
- If ice conditions are present, consider suspension of vehicle operations until surfaces are clear.
- Monitor for wind chill and ambient temperature conditions. Establish work/warming cycles per OSHA guidelines.

4.05 All emergency notifications will be issued via radio as well as text/alert apps. All personnel should confirm receipt of alerts and report status and location. An “All Clear” will be issued by the Safety Officer after reassessment of conditions.

4.06 Each base camp and operational area shall have pre-identified severe weather shelter location(s) for personnel. Evacuation and accountability plans should be reviewed at operational briefings.

- 4.07 All severe weather-related suspensions, relocations and notable incidents should be documented in the deployment log. (214)

5.0 WATER RESCUE GUIDELINES

- 5.01 TX-TF1 Water Squads are typically prepositioned in advance of severe weather. Their mission requires them to travel under adverse weather conditions in order to perform active water rescues. The decision to send water assets to perform rescues in severe weather conditions will consider the risk vs benefit and be made by the Water Group Supervisor and the Squad Leader.
- 5.02 TX-TF1 Water Squad will follow the general guidelines outlined in this document while training and while prepositioning in nonemergent situations.

6.0 HELICOPTER SEARCH & RESCUE GUIDELINES

- 6.01 TX-TF1 HSART personnel will follow the severe weather guidelines detailed by the agency they are assigned to fly with.
- 6.02 TX-TF1 HSART personnel will follow the general guidelines outlined in this document while enroute to and from training.