



HENRY DARGAN McMASTER
GOVERNOR

November 21, 2024

The Honorable Marcia Adams
Executive Director
Department of Administration
1200 Senate Street, Suite 460
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

RE: *Hazardous-Weather Policies and Procedures*

Dear Director Adams:

I write to request that the Department of Administration conduct a review of the State's policies and procedures pertaining to closing state government offices for hazardous weather and to recommend any necessary or appropriate modifications or amendments.

As you know, the State's longstanding hazardous-weather procedure for closing state government offices provides that state agencies and departments, including state-supported colleges, universities, and technical colleges, must follow county government closure decisions in the county where the state offices are located. *E.g.*, Executive Order No. 2024-33, § 1(H) (Nov. 7, 2024). Under this policy, state agency heads retain the authority and discretion to designate emergency personnel or other critical employees as essential or mission-critical to the State's preparation for or response to emergency conditions or otherwise necessary to serve the State or to ensure the continuity of critical operations of state government and to require that any such employees report to work. In the event of a county closure, state agencies are required to utilize, to the maximum extent possible, telecommuting or work-from-home options for non-essential employees.

The current hazardous-weather procedure, which was designed to ensure the safety of state employees and the public, has generally served the State well. For instance, the current approach implicitly acknowledges that, in many instances, county officials are often the closest to and the most familiar with local forecasts and conditions. It was also crafted in recognition of the fact that state agencies' county or regional offices are often co-located in county-owned buildings or facilities.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned benefits, in light of recent experience and the relocation of certain state agencies from Richland County to Lexington County, I believe it is worth revisiting the current approach to hazardous-weather events and reconsidering whether state agencies should follow county closure determinations in some or all counties. For instance, while the current approach provides flexibility and avoids overbroad statewide closure scenarios, we must also recognize that county officials are not responsible for evaluating (and understandably may not consider) the “upstream” effects of their closure decisions on state agencies or state offices.

As we have seen in recent years, different counties make closure determinations based on a multitude of different factors, as is their prerogative. For example, some counties may strictly adhere to recommendations from (and the risk tolerance of) county emergency managers, whereas other counties may opt to follow school district closure decisions. In these circumstances, the resulting patchwork of approaches may create confusion for employees and the general public and unnecessarily impede state government operations. Particularly in the Midlands, as state agencies relocate or expand beyond Richland County, one county’s well-intentioned closure decision can have unintended consequences not only for county-specific offices but also for state agency headquarters. Following county closures can create similar confusion in other areas of the State, where agencies, universities, or other institutions may have offices located in more than one county, or footprints that span multiple counties, leaving agency heads and human resources administrators in an unenviable position.

For the foregoing reasons, I request that you and your staff at the Department of Administration’s Division of State Human Resources carefully review the State’s existing policies and procedures and provide any recommendations regarding potential modifications or amendments that would not only continue to promote the safety of state employees and the general public but also simultaneously improve state government operations by avoiding unintended practical implications and minimizing confusion for agency personnel and the customers and constituents they serve.

As always, thank you for your continued leadership and service to the State of South Carolina.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Henry Dargan McMaster".

Henry Dargan McMaster

cc: Director Karen L. Wingo
Division of State Human Resources

Director Kim Stenson
Emergency Management Division