

Adverse Weather Policy

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Introduction

Aims

This policy focuses on the impact that adverse and extreme weather may have upon sessions and what action to take should there be doubt or concern regarding the safety of running sessions for the Outdoors group (consisting of The Outdoors School, Forest School and TLP). All information gathered to inform decisions made should be sourced from the MET Office in collaboration with the staff knowledge of the site(s) in question.

Scope

This policy is applicable to all staff working for The Outdoors Groups and Parents, Customers, Ofsted, Local Authority.

It covers all activities undertaken by the company.

High Winds

High winds can pose risks to sessions and activities in several ways, primarily due to the nature of our work being situated within woodland beneath trees that can be affected by wind-speed/force.

Several factors should be considered when assessing the potential risk of forecasted or observed winds: topography; the variety, age and species of trees; soil type; infrastructure; onsite facilities (all of which have been considered in the following information).

When assessing wind-speed forecasts, the leading member of staff for a given session should rely upon forecasts given by the MET Office. Other forecasters can be used to gain an idea of the spectrum of forecasted wind, but the MET Office forecast should determine any action that needs to be taken.

MET office forecasts are issued in MPH (miles per hour). The MET office will forecast an hourly average wind-speed as well as the highest gust in any given hour. Details can be found at www.metoffice.gov.uk

These should be used in conjunction with the Beaufort Scale to achieve insight into expected conditions in the woodland.

The Beaufort Scale

Force	MPH	Description	Specification for Use on Land
0	0-1	Calm	Calm; smoke rises vertically.
1	1-3	Light Air	Direction of wind shown by smoke drift, but not wind by vanes.
2	4-7	Light Breeze	Wind felt on face; leaves rustle, ordinary vanes moved by wind.
3	8-12	Gentle Breeze	Leaves and small twigs in constant motion; wind extends a light flag.
4	13-18	Moderate Breeze	Raises dust and loose paper; small branches are moved.
5	19-24	Fresh Breeze	Small trees in leaf begin to sway; crested wavelets form on inland waters.
6	25-31	Strong Breeze	Large branches in motion; whistling heard in telegraph wires; umbrellas used with difficulty.
7	32-38	Near Gale	Whole trees in motion; inconvenience felt when walking against the wind.
8	39-46	Gale	Breaks twigs off trees; generally impedes progress.
9	47-54	Severe Gale	Slight structural damage occurs (chimney pots and slates removed).

10	55-63	Storm	Seldom experienced inland; trees uprooted; considerable structural damage occurs.
11	66-72	Violent Storm	Very rarely experienced; accompanied by wide-spread damage.
12	73-83	Hurricane	Very rarely experienced; accompanied by wide-spread damage.

When to cancel sessions

The following table considers individual site characteristics and dictates when a session should be cancelled because of actual/forecasted wind speed.

Wind including gusts	<31 mph (force 6)	32-39mph (force 7/8)	40-46mph (force 8)	>46mph
Shillingford (Exeter)	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, but be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire.	If winds are consistently above 40mph, consider cancelling/closure	CANCEL/ CLOSURE
Exmouth	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, though be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire. Be extra aware as winds approach force 8.	CANCEL/ CLOSURE	CANCEL/ CLOSURE
Escot	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, though be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire. Be extra aware as winds approach force 8.	CANCEL/ CLOSURE	CANCEL/ CLOSURE
Totnes	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, though be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire. Be extra aware as winds approach force 8.	CANCEL/ CLOSURE	CANCEL/ CLOSURE

Okehampton	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, though be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire. Be extra aware as winds approach force 8.	CANCEL/ CLOSURE	CANCEL/ CLOSURE
Tiverton	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, though be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire. Be extra aware as winds approach force 8.	If winds are consistently above 40mph, consider cancelling/ closure	CANCEL/ CLOSURE
South Brent	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, though be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire. Be extra aware as winds approach force 8.	If winds are consistently above 40mph, consider cancelling/ closure	CANCEL/ CLOSURE
TLP Sites	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, though be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire. Be extra aware as winds approach force 8.	If winds are consistently above 40mph, consider cancelling/ closure	CANCEL/ CLOSURE
Ext. School Sites	Fine to run with no issue.	Fine to run, though be aware of impact of higher gusts on shelters and fire.	Cancellation should be considered. Seek advice of manager.	CANCEL/ CLOSURE

The Outdoors School Responsibilities and Procedures

Outlining the responsibilities for Severe Weather and Emergency Closure Routine.

In the event of the decision being made:

In the event of extreme circumstances, such as adverse weather conditions, it is possible that the school may have to close for the day. In this case a decision will be taken usually early in the morning. However, rarely, if conditions seriously deteriorate during the day, a decision may be taken to close school early to ensure that learners and staff get home safely.

The process of making the decision:

The decision about closure will be made by the Headteacher. When deciding whether to close The Outdoors School, the following are taken into consideration:

- Whether the school facilities are safe for learners and staff.
- Whether sufficient staff will be able to get to school to supervise learners safely.
- The probability of conditions worsening and consequently making journeys home very difficult.

The Headteacher will make this call by 7:00am, supported by SLT and Site Managers in making the decision with all the information available to them at that time.

Information for staff

Once a decision has been made:

- The Headteacher will ensure all SLT & School Administrators know.
- The Headteacher will inform Directors and the 0-25's team.
- A whole school or site-specific email will go out to staff.
- The Deputy headteacher will phone Site Leads and the Operations Manager.
- The School Administrator will ensure the website is updated.
- (Site) Assistant SENDCo will ensure that work is arranged and sent out to learners by Curriculum and Pastoral tutors.
- The Site Manager will phone the Curriculum and Pastoral tutors and ask them to inform their staff in their groups to ensure they all know.
- The School Administrator will contact transport.

The process of informing parents, guardians, and learners

Once a decision has been made:

- Pastoral tutors will text parents/guardians if they have their work phones (or call using 141 if they don't have their work phones) to inform them school is closed.

Information for parents and guardians

Early morning school closure decisions

If we do need to close the school, there are two methods by which we will make an announcement.

1. Sending parents/guardians a text message.
2. Making an announcement on the school website
<https://www.outdoorsgroup.co.uk/outdoorsschool/>

The announcement will be clearly visible on the home page and news feed. When reading this information, please check the date carefully. It is unusual for us to know the day before that the school will be closed and the decision about closure is usually made on a day-to-day basis by 8:00 am.

Notice of the closure will also be placed on Devon County Council's website <https://new.devon.gov.uk/schools/closure/> on their school closures page.

Closure during the school day

If a decision is taken to close early, we will send a text message out as a matter of priority. A bulletin will also be posted on the homepage of the school website advising that the school will be closing and at what time. Devon County Council (see above) will also be advised.

Designated phone numbers

As the text messaging service is now a key part of the communication process from school to parents, this system can only work when we have a clearly identified designated phone number in our system. It is therefore vital that the School is notified when contact numbers change.

Forest School and TLP Responsibilities and Procedures

Outlining the responsibilities for Severe Weather and Emergency Closure Routine.

In the event of the decision being made:

In the event of extreme circumstances, such as adverse weather conditions, it is possible that the sites may have to close for the day. In this case a decision will be taken usually early in the morning. However, rarely, if conditions seriously deteriorate during the day, a decision may be taken to close a site early to ensure that the public, learners, and staff get home safely.

The process of making the decision:

A decision about closure will be made by the appropriate Site Lead in collaboration with The Head of Forest School or Head of TLP. When deciding whether to close the following are taken into consideration:

- Whether the site is safe for public, learners, and staff.
- Whether staff will be able to get to site safely.
- The probability of conditions worsening and consequently making journeys home difficult.

Acting upon a decision to cancel a session and refund policy for Forest School and TLP

If the decision has been made to cancel a given session, the attendee/learners' parent/guardian/carer should be contacted at the earliest reasonable convenience, preferably with at least 24 hours' notice from the specified beginning time of the session. Should 24 hours' notice not be possible due to reasons outside of our control (a forecast that changes for the worse, for example) then the attendee/learners' parent/guardian/carer will be contacted as soon as the decision is made.

For information on whether the cancellation warrants issuing a partial/full refund or if no refund can be offered, refer to our Payments Policy.

The above criteria can be difficult, if possible, to measure and judge on site for the time of observation. Much of the assessment of whether to run a session will be made (preferably 24 hours) prior to the session commencing with the information provided by the MET Office.

However, leading staff are in a position of duty to cancel a session with regards to safety **at any point** and should use their experience and judgement to inform this decision at the time of cancellation, whether a given session has begun or not.

Low Temperature, Snow, and Ice

A combination of low temperatures, snow, and ice can lead to dangerous conditions on all The Outdoors Group Ltd. sites. Senior Leaders need to consider the safety of our learners, customers, and staff, not only during the sessions/the day, but also as they travel to and from our sites.

Heavy snow will cause the roads to become dangerous instantly, as well as causing a risk of people not being able to get their cars out of the car park and therefore becoming stuck. Exceptionally low temperatures during sessions can also pose a risk, especially to the children, and should be factored in.

The correct clothing worn during a short 2-hour session may be fine when the temperatures drop, but if staff are running a long 6-hour session and do not have adequate inside space, then this could be dangerous.

Lightning Strikes

The responsibility for monitoring weather conditions and issuing lightning alerts will be assigned to Site Leads who will interpret weather forecasts and radar information. In the event of a lightning alert or thunderstorm warning, staff will immediately notify all participants and guide them to designated safe areas such as fully enclosed buildings or vehicles. These areas will be established in advance and will be clearly communicated to all staff and participants as needed.

If participants are dispersed throughout the forest, staff will be trained to efficiently gather and relocate them to safe shelter areas. Emergency procedures will be communicated and practiced regularly.

Action following lightning strike

All outdoor activities will be suspended immediately when a lightning alert or thunderstorm is imminent, and participants will be guided to move to safe shelter areas until the weather conditions improve or the session will be cancelled. Outdoor activities will only resume when it is deemed safe to do so, following the guidance of relevant weather authorities. Participants will be informed when it is safe to return to their respective activities.

Documentation

All instances of lightning alerts, safety measures taken, and communication efforts will be documented for future review and improvement of lightning safety procedures.

Weather Warnings and What They Mean

Please follow the MET Office for your decision making.

Further information can be found at www.metoffice.gov.uk/guide/weather/warnings

YELLOW	Severe weather is possible over the next few days and could affect you. Yellow means that you should plan to think about travel delays, or the disruption of your day-to-day activities. The Met Office is monitoring the developing weather situation and yellow means keep an eye on the latest forecast and be aware that the weather may change or worsen, leading to disruption of your plans in the next few days.
AMBER	There is an increased likelihood of bad weather affecting you, which could potentially disrupt your plans and possibly cause travel delays, road and rail closures, interruption to power and the potential risk to life and property. Amber means you need to be prepared to change your plans and protect you, your family and community from the impacts of the severe weather based on the forecast from the Met Office.
RED	Extreme weather is expected. Red means you should act now to keep yourself and others safe from the impact of the weather. Widespread damage, travel, and power disruption and risk to life is likely. You must avoid dangerous areas and follow the advice of the emergency services and local authorities.

When to consider cancelling sessions/closing The Outdoors School

- Heavy snow (enough to settle on the roads) during a session that may make the roads dangerous or inhibit parents, learners, staff, and customers being able to leave the carpark.
Heavy snow the day before a session where the temperature does not go above freezing during the night, causing the roads to freeze (extra precaution taken for more remote Forest School sites).
- Temperatures are below freezing, with a wind chill factor around the -5 to -10 range could be a cause for cancellation (depending on the age of your children and any inside space you can use).
- Any **Amber** warnings issued for the days around your session.
- Any **Red** warnings issued for the days around your session.

Flooding and other Extreme Weather Conditions

The weather conditions to cause disruption to sessions have been noted above, though other conditions may also cause threat to the safety of attendees and staff, both whilst on site and when travelling between sites and homes.

In the event of any such an episode being forecast, action should be taken at the earliest possible convenience to limit disruption and preserve the safety of all concerned.

In the unlikely event of any unforeseen weather event such as flash-flooding occurring while staff and attendees are on site, then **evacuation procedures** should be adhered to. Evacuation procedures can be found on each site's **Site Plan**, complete with site maps and relevant information for emergency services. All staff should be familiar with these procedures, and they should be displayed on site for visitors to see.