

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

County Government with a Unified Voice!

M. CLAIRE FRENCH
NJAC President
Monmouth County Clerk

JOHN G. DONNADIO
Executive Director

SNOW DAYS *Survey Summary 2014*

Thank you to everyone that responded to Union County's request for information concerning how your county handles emergency closings with respect to requiring certain employees to report to or remain at work during such closings. This is a much trickier issue than it appears on its face, but we received very good responses summarized below and input from the county human resources directors at our meeting on February 7th. Please also find attached for your review a copy of Delaware's Essential Employees Policy courtesy of Somerset County's Director of Human Resources Bev Hacker. Bev provided us with an overview of the policy and is using the Delaware model as a basis for a new policy in Somerset County.

ATLANTIC COUNTY

Atlantic County's essential personnel includes: 24 hour operations, emergency management, kitchen, and public works. Depending on when the snow begins, the County may keep essential personnel on the job or call them into work. During the last heavy snowstorm, which occurred late in the evening and through the morning, the County elected to open at 10:00 a.m., which gave the County and State time to assess the road situation. The County also maintains a call tree, which it begins with public works and emergency management to determine the conditions of the roads and what are some of the hazardous conditions that motorists will experience. Based on this information, the County makes a decision on when to open. Non-essential employees may not report to work if they feel it's unsafe to travel, but they must use sick, vacation, or personal time accordingly. The County also uses a reverse 9-1-1 system to contact employees and county residents during serious storms and when evacuations may be necessary. The County maintains two committees, COOP/COG (continuation of operations/continuation of government) and a separate executive committee of the COOP/COG that helps plan for future needs, resources, processes, inventories, etc., based on prior storms.

BERGEN COUNTY

Bergen County closes when the Governor declares a State of Emergency and either orders or cautions that non-essential personnel should stay off the road.

However, the County requires essential employees to report to work. Department heads pre-identify essential personnel, which may vary depending on the nature of the emergency. The County recently explored using some form of documentation system to identify essential personnel, but the task has proven more complex than anticipated. The County is also working with its risk manager and insurance consultant to determine potential liability issues if the County does not close when the Governor declares a State of Emergency. In general, the County deals with the topic of early closings and delayed openings on a case-by-case basis.

CAMDEN

Camden County is in the process of updating and finalizing an essential and non-essential employee plan. The County closed during a storm a few years ago and one of its unions sued the County to recoup the time for those employees that were previously scheduled to have the day off. The County lost the case and has since adopted the motto that “we are never closed”!

CUMBERLAND

Cumberland County maintains an informal policy that it never closes unless so ordered by executive order. The County advises non-essential employees that they may not report to work if they feel its unsafe to travel, but they must use sick, vacation, or personal time accordingly.

GLOUCESTER

Gloucester County rarely closes, nor does it authorize delayed openings or early dismissals. In fact, the County closed 2 hours early on only one occasion during this entire winter. The County has been consistent with this practice for at least 21 years. Employees may choose to use personnel or vacation time, but the County requires doctor verification for employees using sick time during a snow or other weather related storm.

HUDSON

Hudson County has closed on two occasions and recently authorized a delayed opening and early dismissal. This decision does not apply to essential employees that are required to report to work or remain at work because of the emergent condition. This decision also does not apply to work locations that are staffed 7 days a week on a 24 hour basis. Essential employees required to report to work or remain at work are paid overtime. For this reason, the County attempts to remain open at all times to minimize the overtime expense. If the County is open and an employee is not able to report to work due to weather conditions, they must use vacation or personal days.

HUNTERDON

Before Hurricane Sandy, Hunterdon County never closed and permitted employees to use leave time accordingly. Following Hurricane Sandy, the County amended its policy and developed the term "Mission Essential Personnel." This practice is based on the mission at hand. For example, election workers are typically considered non-essential employees; however, during Hurricane Sandy they became mission essential employees as they had to manage the general elections. The County also implemented a policy for delayed openings and early dismissals providing hour-for-hour compensation time pay for employees required to work.

MERCER

After input from executive staff and field personnel, the County Executive makes a call to alter schedules accordingly. The County has closed for one day or more (during Hurricane Sandy) and the County's largest unions have a contract clause awarding hour-for-hour compensatory time for essential employees who report. Although the County maintains a list of essential personnel, circumstances may lead to variations. Other unions and unrepresented employees follow suit. All closings, but not all altered schedules, are accompanied by a local Declaration of Emergency. Additionally, the County uses reverse 9-1-1 as a means for advising the public and employees. The County maintains a self-registration portal that permits the County to reach individuals selectively and devices other than land line telephones.

MONMOUTH

Monmouth County requires essential personnel to report to work. Essential personnel includes law enforcement, 9-1-1, corrections, health care, and DPW. The County will hold over these employees if relief does not report. The County has not closed for an entire day in several years, but has had delayed openings and early dismissals this year. Non-essential employees may use leave time if they choose to stay home.

OCEAN

Ocean County's policy is as follows: "Storm Days -- Ocean County employees are expected to report to work every day as scheduled regardless of weather conditions. Relaxed leave policy may be in effect during storm days as declared by the County of Ocean. Employees may choose to use accumulated compensatory time, vacation days, personal days or, alternatively, request time off without compensation

PASSAIC

Passaic County never closes. Before Mr. DeNova's tenure, the County closed following a storm and one of its PBAs demanded overtime for their workers

since other personnel were given the day off. The County lost the grievance and had to pay all essential personnel overtime. Since that time, the County never closes, nor does it authorize delayed openings or early dismissals. The only exception to this policy is if the Governor declares a State of Emergency that specifically includes a ban on travel. With respect to requiring certain personnel to remain at work, the County may require certain employees to remain at its healthcare facility to maintain proper coverage. The County is authorized to use its Sheriff's department to pick up employees if necessary. However, the County has yet to use this procedure.