

Inclement Weather Tips, Procedures and Guidance

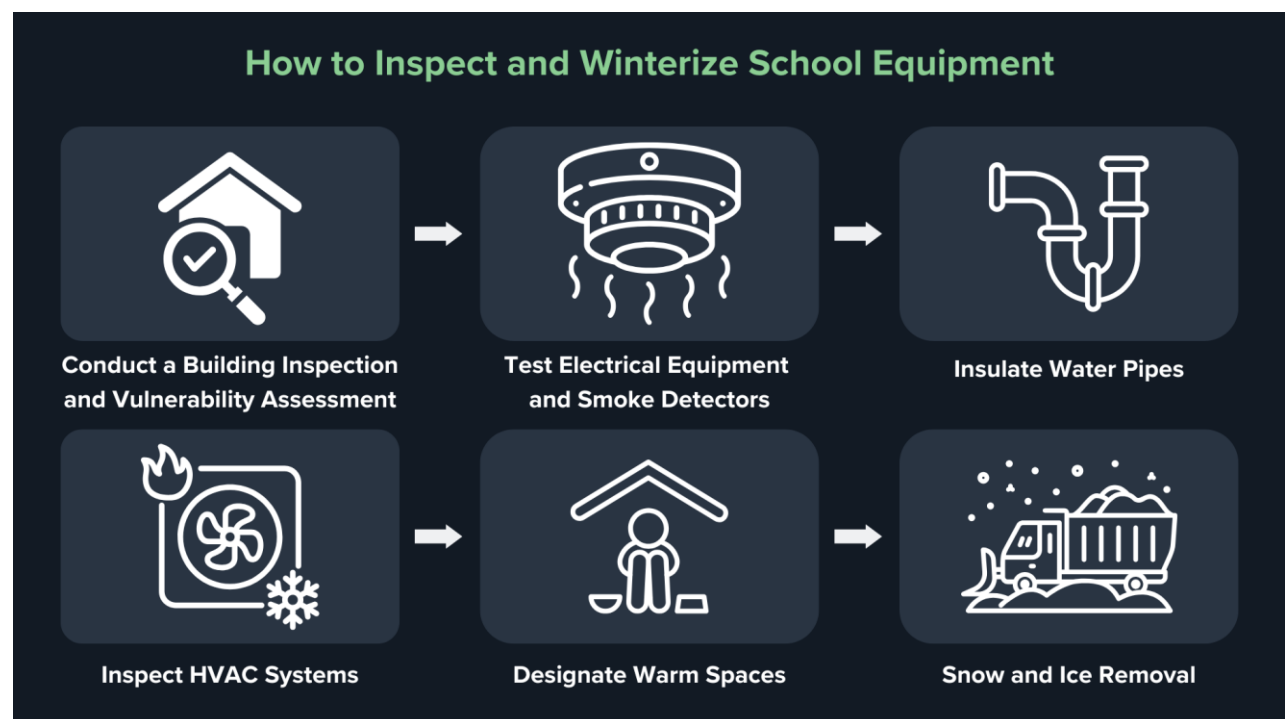
Winter Weather

Schools are particularly vulnerable, as winter weather affects transportation, campus safety, and overall logistics. A proactive approach to winter weather safety can mitigate these risks, keeping students safe and operations running smoothly.

To prepare schools for winter weather, facility managers should inspect facilities, closely monitor weather, establish an emergency response plan, maintain clear communication with parents and prioritize transportation and safety protocols.

Here is a step-by-step guide packed with winter safety tips on how schools can step up their cold weather readiness:

Step 1: Inspect and winterize school equipment: Before winter sets in, perform a detailed inspection of the school buildings and prioritize repairs to mitigate potential hazards. Here's what you should do:



Step 1.1. Conduct a building inspection and vulnerability assessment: Inspect school building roofs for leaks and snow load capacity, and seal windows and doors to prevent drafts and heat loss from heavy snow.

Pro-Tip: Consider heated walkways or rock salt to melt ice ways and address snow accumulation in critical zones.

1.2. Test electrical equipment and smoke detectors: Preventative maintenance steps include:

- 1) Testing and servicing smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms. Carbon monoxide incidents are 50% more likely in colder months.
- 2) Inspecting backup generators in case of power outages.
- 3) Cleaning and inspecting heating equipment and chimneys annually.

1.3. Insulate water pipes: Unprotected water pipes can freeze and burst during sudden temperature drops. Insulating pipes helps prevent such scenarios and reduces energy costs.

1.4. Inspect HVAC systems: A functioning HVAC system is critical for maintaining a warm indoor environment during winter. To ensure reliability:

- 1) Replace filters to optimize efficiency and air quality.
- 2) Check thermostats and recalibrate them if needed.
- 3) Conduct a professional inspection to identify worn components that may fail under strain.

Pro-Tip: Create or download a winterization checklist to streamline the process for facility managers and maintenance teams.

Step 2: Proactive Weather Planning – Monitor Weather Forecasts: Accurately monitoring weather conditions is a cornerstone of effective school safety decision-making in cold weather. Standard news reports are often too generalized for schools' needs. Based on the weather forecasts, make sure to:

- 1) **Plan for Early Arrivals:** Cold weather often necessitates changes in student drop-off times, as buses or personal vehicles may need to depart earlier to avoid icy roads or traffic delays. To accommodate these adjustments:
 - a) **Open School Buildings Earlier:** Schools should allow children inside school buildings as early as possible during cold weather, ensuring their safety and comfort.
 - b) **Notify Parents Promptly:** Use email alerts, text messages, or school apps to inform families of changes to schedules or safety measures.

Pro-Tip: Invest in advanced weather alert systems and set up a weather monitoring station to stay on top of weather safety concerns.

Step 3: Create a Winter Weather Response Action Plan: All schools need to have a clear, actionable plan that outlines emergency response procedures for closures due to snow, ice, or extreme cold.

- 1) **Identify key decision-makers**, such as principals or district administrators, and establish a chain of command for emergency communications.
- 2) **Assign responsibilities** for assessing on-site weather conditions, communicating updates,

and activating emergency protocols.

- 3) **Develop contingency plans** for remote learning in the event of prolonged closures.
- 4) **Train staff on winter weather hazards.** Educate students and staff on winter weather hazards, such as frostbite, hypothermia, and carbon monoxide poisoning.
 - a) Provide guidance on appropriate first aid measures.
 - b) Host workshops led by health professionals on recognizing and treating cold-related illnesses.
 - c) Use carbon monoxide detectors in all heated indoor spaces.

***Pro-Tip:** Review and update the winter weather response plan annually to ensure it remains effective and addresses potential risks.*



Step 4: Communicate Proactively with Parents, Staff and Students: By keeping all stakeholders informed, schools can mitigate confusion, maintain safety, and build trust. Here’s how to make your communication strategy robust and actionable:

- 1) **Invest in a centralized notification system** that automates sending mass real-time alerts via text and email. These notification systems can streamline communication with instant notifications, so critical information about closures, delays, or severe weather threats reaches everyone at the same time.
- 2) **Maintain a Winter Weather Advisory Bulletin:** Keep the community informed about anticipated weather impacts and decision criteria for closures or delays. Maintain a “Winter Weather Advisory Bulletin” during winter months, with a short summary of the forecast and its potential impacts on school operations.

Step 5: Prioritize Transportation Safety Protocols: Schools should have a plan for safely transporting athletic teams during winter weather, considering road conditions and the need for adjustments or cancellations.

- 1) **Create a transportation contingency plan:** Prepare for icy roads and poor visibility by scheduling delayed starts, early dismissals, or closures when needed.
- 2) **Transportation Staff Communication:** Equip bus drivers with mobile devices or radios for real-time updates on road conditions and decisions.
- 3) **Adaptive Scheduling:** Incorporate weather-related adjustments into the school calendar ahead of time to minimize disruptions.
- 4) **Winterize School Buses:** Ensure school buses are winterized with proper tire chains, winter tires, and heating systems to maintain optimal performance in adverse weather.
 - a) **Tires and Chains:** Equip buses with winter tires or chains to improve traction on slippery surfaces.
 - b) **Engine Maintenance:** Use cold-weather engine oils and antifreeze to keep buses running smoothly in low temperatures.



Safe Driving Practices for Winter Conditions

Provide seasonal training focused on winter safety driving tips for icy, snowy, or low-visibility conditions.

- 1) Teach bus drivers winter driving safety precautions and best practices on how to handle skids, maximize traction, and navigate in low-visibility conditions.
- 2) **Reduce Speed:** While driving on snow, roads can become deceptively slick due to black ice, requiring slower speeds to maintain control.
- 3) **Maintain Safe Following Distance:** Double the typical following distance to account for longer braking times on icy or wet roads.

Tornado and School Transportation

At times certain weather conditions may occur which will necessitate the cancellation or delay of school bus routes, school athletic, extracurricular activities, or field trips. This document provides **suggested** safety protocols and procedures on tornados.

Procedures Prior To Any Emergency

It is said that the only thing harder than planning for an emergency is explaining why you did not. Prior to being involved in any emergency situation, whether it is a crash, first aid or weather related, is it important that basic procedures are in place and practiced. Best practice suggests:

- 1) Each school bus carries an up-to-date roster of passengers, whether the function is a daily route or activity trip.
- 2) Each school bus carries an up-to-date contact list for school officials and emergency responders consisting of at least telephone numbers (land line and mobile). To the extent practical similar information is available when traveling on out-of-district activity trips.
- 3) Students, including those that would only ride a school bus for activity trips, participate in school bus evacuation drills at least twice a school year.
- 4) On activity trips, all passengers (students, adults, teachers, coaches, chaperones, etc.) are advised of the school bus emergency exit locations and their operation. (e.g., service door, push out windows, side and rear emergency doors, and roof hatches) The school bus driver should demonstrate the operation of each type of exit.
- 5) The location of the first aid kit, seat belt cutter, and fire extinguisher.
- 6) The location and operation of the bus two-way radio or other communication equipment, if so equipped.

Tornado

According to the National Weather Service, tornadoes can occur at any time of day or night, any time of the year. In Oklahoma, peak tornado occurrences are from April to June and between 4 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Guidance

- 1) The school district should have a written severe weather policy that includes school transportation procedures for routes, athletic, field trip and extracurricular activities.
- 2) Prior to the threat of severe weather, the responsibility of the school bus driver includes:
 - c) Being thoroughly familiar with all roads adjoining their route in the event they are needed to seek shelter.
 - d) Having availability of a map to determine alternate routes for safety athletic, extracurricular activities, and field trips.
 - e) Having pre-determined shelter options (buildings, schools, businesses, homes) along various parts of the route should evacuation be necessary and to the extent

practical similar options when on activity trips. In emergency situations most people will offer others shelter when asked.

- f) Knowing the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning. A “watch” means tornadoes are possible in your area; remain alert for approaching storms. A “warning” means a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar.
- 3) School administrators and school bus drivers are to routinely monitor weather reports for the prediction of severe weather or announcements of weather advisories. Once en route (daily route or activity trip), the school district should have a means to communicate this information to the school bus driver.
- 4) When a “tornado watch” is issued, a school bus driver is to be prepared for a sudden change in weather condition and alert for the appearance of violent wind, rain, hail, or a funnel shaped cloud.
- 5) When a “tornado warning” is issued, a school bus driver is to promptly seek shelter for the passengers.
 - a) If the warning is announced at or near the dismissal of school, the school day students are to remain in the building in a designated safe area.
 - b) If the warning is announced while en route, a school bus driver is to go to a pre-identified shelter or building closest to their current location depending on the immediacy of the tornado threat.
 - c) If caught in the direct path of a tornado or one is sighted and a pre-identified shelter is not accessible, the school bus driver should:
 - i. Stop and evacuate the passengers. Do not attempt to “out run” the tornado. Do not stay on the school bus. If the bus is radio equipped advise the school transportation office of your bus number and location.
 - ii. Seek safety in a below ground level area, such as a ditch, ravine, or depression in a location that is:
 1. Away from the bus; and
 2. Where practical on the side of the road without power lines, utility poles, trees etc.
 - iii. Not use above ground locations for shelter. (e.g., road or bridge over passes)
 - iv. Instruct passengers to lie flat, face first and to protect their head by using a jacket, other clothing, or their hands and arms. Advise passengers to “not sneak a peek” at the tornado.
- 6) After the emergency:
 - a) Account for all passengers, check for injuries, and provide first aid if needed. Obtain medical attention if needed.
 - b) Be alert of continued storm activity, downed power lines, ruptured gas lines, or structural damage to trees, buildings, roads and bridges.
 - c) Before leaving a shelter or the immediate area if out in the open, the bus driver should monitor the local sky for a few minutes in the direction the tornado came from to ensure a second tornado does not follow a similar path.
 - d) Establish communication with the transportation office and determine the next steps to take with the children.