

Cold Weather Advice for Schools

Over recent winters we have experienced some harsh conditions, therefore it is important to remember how to protect your staff, property and prevent insurance claims.

The advice in this document has been provided by:

- Risk & Business Continuity
- Insurance
- Health & Safety
- Passenger Transport
- Premises & Planning
- Shire Services
- Premises Services

Contact details for the above can be found at the end of this document.



Emergency Closures/Snowline

There is in place a procedure to follow should an emergency closure of your school be necessary due to severe weather. Please see the following area of the Shropshire Learning Gateway: -

<https://www.shropshirelg.net/leadership-management-and-administration/cold-weather-advice/emergency-closure/>

Please note, access is restricted to headteacher SLG user accounts (e.g., head@, exehead@)

Salt Supply

This year's Salt/Grit suppliers are: -

Tivoli Services

Robert Barass, Operations Manager

Email: robert.barrass@tivoliservices.com

For details of this year's supplier please use the following link: -

[2023 – 2024 Salt Supply Information](#)



Protecting your Property - Internal and External

Extreme cold conditions can lead to burst pipes and subsequent water damage in Shropshire Council properties. Although the resulting damage in such cases is covered by the Council's corporate Property Insurance, the time spent in with the incident, together with any related claim will not be.

A claim for extensive water damage can mean that the repairs and the claim are not for many months. The simplest solution is to do what you can to prevent an incident occurring in the first place and also to look for ways to minimise the damage if something was to happen.

Attached at Appendix A are three checklists to assist you when considering ways to protect your school and people who use your site:

- heating checklist
- pipework checklist
- site maintenance checklist

Please note these finalised checklists are not exhaustive - they are merely a starting point.

Gritting/Salting

It is a popular misconception that an occupier cannot be held liable for failing to clear snow/ice, but can be held liable once an attempt at clearance has been made and then someone injured. The true position is that an occupier can be held liable for 'failing to act reasonably' in order to prevent accidents.

There are several areas of legislation where it is pointed out a duty of care is owed to the employees, pupils and visitors (lawful or unlawful) including:

- Health & Safety at Work Act
- Workplace Regulations
- Occupiers Liability Act

It is important that access to school sites and buildings is safe for staff, pupils and visitors and adequate arrangements are made to ensure risks from snow and ice are minimised. It is recognised it is not possible to remove immediately every piece of snow and ice - so we must prove whatever we decide to do is reasonable and practicable.

The key to defending slipping on snow/ice claims is to prove that you have a system in place and that you follow your procedures/policies. The courts would require documentation to prove the following points before deciding if a school had been negligent:

- a snow/ice/gritting policy in place at the time of the incident



- the policy is reasonable/practicable
- the policy is communicated to staff and other relevant site users
- the procedures set out in the policy were adhered to

Our Health & Safety Team have also advised:

Winter gritting of car parks and paths can be time consuming and a resource issue. This is where risk assessment comes into place by prioritising action based on the nature, frequency etc. of the hazards identified. Your risk assessment should consider, main routes, pathways etc. Control measures should consider communications to members of staff and to visitors who will come onto the site, limiting access to some areas in severe weather etc.

Some measures can include: using Met Office data – to anticipate the impact of bad weather. This means that salting can be done in advance of a bad frost and also you only salt when you need to – potentially saving time and resource over the course of a winter.

Finally, don't forget the need to demonstrate that you've taken reasonable steps. Bad weather is above all unpredictable. Even if you very significantly reduce the risks, an accident is still possible. To effectively pre-empt legal challenges and insurance claims, documenting any action you do take is important.

Headteachers for schools should ensure adequate risk assessments have been carried out and the control measures identified are in place prior to the winter season.

The control measures may include:

- the adequate provision/storage of de-icing salt as appropriate
- identifying those who would carry out the salting activity
- ensuring adequate training has been provided including manual handling
- producing a gritting plan to prioritise which areas will be treated and brought to the attention of all those concerned.

There is no simple answer to the gritting questions. Each school will have different needs and therefore require individual risk assessments.

As a guide to documenting such an assessment use the following link to a 'gritting in icy conditions' generic template which can be used by premises to set out their local procedures for dealing with such conditions.

[How do I complete a risk assessment? - SC Intranet \(shropshire.gov.uk\)](#)

Remember - this document must be personalised to suit the individual school and is a guide as to the kind of issues that require consideration.

Guidelines for Shire Services Cleaner in Charge staff at primary schools where Shire Services staff are responsible for opening the premises are detailed at Appendix C.



Vehicle Maintenance

If you are using a vehicle in cold/icy conditions, it is important that you consider the following:

- Follow national guidance - only set out if your journey is absolutely necessary. Please note that where the local authority has advised schools (based on Government's advice) not to travel, the cancellation cost may be covered by your school's trip insurance.
- If you must travel, make sure you have certain items in the vehicle, e.g. shovel, de-icer, warm clothing and blankets, food, hot drinks and a fully charged mobile phone.
- Adapt your driving style to the conditions. Be smooth and gentle with steering and brakes and allow much longer breaking distances than you would normally. Always try and use the highest possible gear to avoid sudden acceleration on icy roads or in snow conditions. Do not attempt to drive through expanses of water.
- When warming your vehicle up - don't leave it unattended with the keys in the ignition - there is no cover for this on any Motor insurance policy.
- Have your Antifreeze checked in the Autumn to ensure that you avoid engine damage caused by frozen cooling systems, check your car handbook to ensure you use the right type of fluid as there are different types required for certain engines.
- Ensure that windscreens and all windows are defrosted and clear before driving.
- Check that wipers are not frozen to screens and water jets are not frozen before being used. To do so may blow a fuse or damage the wiper motor and blades. Use 'All Season' or 'Winter Screen wash'.
- For vehicles equipped with Air conditioning or Climate control the quickest way to demist or defrost the vehicle is to put the system on re-circulation, maximum heat and run for 5 minutes.
- If your battery is sluggish in autumn, get it checked as Frosty weather can reduce the battery efficiency by 30%

Attached at Appendix B is a Vehicle Maintenance to assist you.

School & Public Transport

The Passenger Transport Group explain their procedures during severe weather in their 'Code of Conduct' which is available to all parents and students and can be found at www.shropshire.gov.uk/school-transport/your-childs-safety/.

For information relating to public transport operating during extreme weather, it is recommended to contact your local bus operator of a particular service to determine reduced frequencies, diversions or cancellations. Contact details of local bus operators in Shropshire can be found at <https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/public-transport/travelling-by-bus/bus-operator-contacts/>



Code of Conduct and Guidance for Operators, Drivers and Escorts

The Passenger Transport Services' Team have produced the above document, which provides severe weather guidance.

Please contact the Passenger Transport Services' Team to obtain a copy of this document.

School Meals (Shire Services)

In the event of severe weather, causing disruption to the school meals service, either by catering staff not being able to attend work or the school being partly or totally closed. You should notify the school meals helpline on 01743 250260 or contact the relevant Area Manager directly.

If catering staff are unable to attend work, alternative arrangements will be put in place to ensure that a hot meal is provided for all children attending school that day. Please do not ask parents to provide a packed lunch unless you have been advised by Shire Services that it will not be possible to provide a meal.

Any queries about the school meals service please call either your Area Manager or the Helpline.

For schools who do not use Shire Services, please contact your individual catering providers for advice in the event of a bad weather incident.

Winter Wellness

There are still measures which can be taken to reduce the risk of catching and spreading Covid-19 and other flu's;

- Getting vaccinated
- Let fresh air into buildings
- Regular hand washing
- Consider wearing face covering in crowded spaces

Please see gov.uk for updated advice and [Self care | Shropshire Council](#).

Business Continuity

To reduce the impact of adverse weather conditions we recommend you consider taking the following steps:

- Review your Emergency Response & Business Recovery Plan.
- Think about how you will communicate with your staff in the event of an out-of-hours incident where, for example, you do not want people to attend a site on the following working day.
- Consider how you might deal with staff who become stranded at work.
- Give early warnings of any problems to your customers and suppliers.



- Make sure you have up to date contact details for all staff.
- List the telephone numbers of the people you may need to contact for assistance, e.g. Insurance team, Premises Services etc.
- Make sure that only essential business travel continues between sites.
- Wherever appropriate provide regular updates to staff and any other impacted stakeholders

Make sure you have up-to-date contact details for staff in ERP.

For guidance on how to update/ add details in the ERP, please find details in this link:-
<https://staff.shropshire.gov.uk/how-do-i/hrpayroll/how-do-i-check-and-update-my-emergency-contact-details-in-the-erp/>

Details on how to do this can be found here:-

[This is a link to a video for updating emergency contact details in the ERP that is accessible corporately and externally.](#)



Contact Information

Risk & Business Continuity Team

(01743) 252851

Jane.cooper@shropshire.gov.uk

Insurance Team

(01743) 258458

insurance@shropshire.gov.uk

Health & Safety Team

(01743) 252819

health.safety@shropshire.gov.uk

Passenger Transport Team

(01743) 253031

Email: ptscontracts@shropshire.gov.uk

Transport Operations Group

(01743) 254944

Premises Services

EMERGENCY OUT OF HOURS MOBILE – 07990 087815

Steve Carpenter – Property Services Group Manager - 01743 281094 / 07990 085499

steve.carpenter@shropshire.gov.uk

Building Surveying – Phil Brown 01743 281067

Building Surveying Business Support – Joyce Brisbane – 01743 281085

Mechanical & Electrical (M&E) – Luke Blakeway 01743 281093

M&E Business Support - Sarah Hesketh – 01743 281051

Help Desk (repairs) – 01743 281079

Shire Services

(01743) 250250

Shire Services (Helplines)

(01743) 250270 for cleaning

(01743) 250260 for catering

HSE

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/faq.htm#icyconditions>

Helpful Links for Weather Monitoring

Met Office website - <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk>

BBC weather website - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/forecast/2>



Appendix A

Heating Checklist	
Monitor weather forecasts and temperature (see Useful Links for Weather Monitoring).	
Check heating systems work.	
Check stocks of heating oil/wood pellets – are these adequate to last for the holiday period.	
Ensure thermostats and frost-stats are working and are set correctly.	
Close all blinds and curtains, tucking curtains behind radiators.	
Pull soft fabrics etc. (e.g. seating) away from radiators/heating appliances so they can function.	
Ensure all radiator valves are in the on position and correctly set.	

Burst Pipe Prevention Checklist	
Consider draining pipes if areas are to be unused for long periods (please note additional terms apply for properties unoccupied for over 30 days – insurance cover is restricted).	
Protect water pipes, especially where they run outside or through unheated areas.	
Ensure insulation is in place, windows are not broken and openings are sealed.	
Turn off extractor fans and check kitchen ventilation systems	
Repair dripping taps, faulty washers to prevent freezing.	
Turn off all valves serving outside taps.	
Know where your stop taps and valves are located – ensure they are not seized up.	
Ensure electrical and other perishable items are not stored on the floor.	
Inspect your buildings daily after a period of freezing weather to look for any damage.	
Notify Premises Services immediately if your water supply becomes frozen, so steps can be taken to avoid damage once a thaw sets in.	
Run taps and flush toilets to check that water in pipes has not frozen.	



Site Maintenance Checklist	
Ensure all outdoor lighting is working and check summer growth of landscaping trees/shrubs does not obscure lighting units or cast strong shadows across pedestrian routes.	
Ensure gutters/downpipes are clear so melting snow/ice can efficiently drain away from the buildings.	
Check roofs for missing/damaged tiles and replace/repair.	
Clear fallen leaves from external pavement steps, basement stairwells, surface drainage gullies, grills or grates.	..
Ensure draining channels and grids are clear to permit melting snow/ice to drain away from the play area surfaces, paths and roadways - reducing the risk of slip hazards in the event of re-freezing.	..



Appendix B

Vehicle Maintenance Checklist	
Keep up to date with road conditions, accidents and road closures.	
Check tyre, battery and wiper blade condition.	
Ensure lights are fully functioning.	
Check oil and fuel levels before leaving.	
Check anti-freeze levels and carry de-icer in case the locks freeze.	
Have your breakdown telephone helpline number and mobile phone with you.	
If you do have an accident and the vehicle is immobilised use your hazard warning lights to alert other motorists.	



Appendix C

Cold Weather Gritting Snow Clearance Advice for Shire Services Cleaner in Charge staff at Primary Schools where Shire Services staff are responsible for opening the premise

Teams who are responsible for clearing snow or gritting areas need to be aware of the appropriate policies and procedures including risk assessments.

Direction on what is acceptable and what is not may differ at each premise.

Staff must take care of themselves during adverse weather conditions as those with key holder responsibilities will be first on site.

It is important that staff have easy access to the equipment needed to clear/ grit access and egress areas.

There will be restrictions at some sites as it would be impractical to clear / grit all pathways. You will need to discuss this with the Headteacher or nominated person on site.

Each site will have an agreement as to which areas will be cleared and this must be communicated to all premise staff and visitors.

Process:

1. Check that premise heating systems are operational.
2. Collect equipment for snow and ice clearance.
3. Observe manual handling risk assessment – do not lift or transport items that are too heavy.
4. Larger areas require a suitable grit spreader to combat ice and snow on access ways. Always clear snow first and then grit the area.
5. To move snow use a suitable clearance shovel – this should be lightweight. Move snow out of pathways, do not lift.
6. Once snow is cleared, grit the area using a suitable spreader.
7. For small areas a reduced quantity of grit in a container can be used. Keep the content to a minimum to avoid injury. Do not twist or over stretch when spreading grit. Always follow Manual Handling procedures and the Gritting Risk Assessments

Do not put yourself at risk, keep yourself safe at all times and follow policy and procedures and the gritting process agreed for your site.

Should you have any queries please contact either your Area Supervisor or the Shire Services Health and Safety Team on (01743) 250255 / (01743) 250256.

