

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE INSTRUCTION 10-104

May 23, 2008

Administration and Management

**PREPARATIONS IN ADVANCE OF, OR DURING, DISASTERS OR MAJOR WEATHER
EMERGENCIES**

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_____ <signed> _____ May 9, 2008 _____
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Preparation in Advance of, or During, Disasters or Major Weather Emergencies

<u>Table of Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Introduction	2
2. Evacuation of Non-Emergency Personnel and Dependents	2
2.1 Advance Preparations	3
2.2 Use of Evacuation Pay.....	3
2.3 Administrative Leave	3
3. Advance Planning.	3
3.1 Continuity of Service and Backup	4
3.2 Consideration of Office Capacities.....	4
3.3 Staffing Considerations.....	4
4. Discretion.....	4
Appendix A: NOAA Implementing Procedures for Use of Evacuation Pay.....	5

1. Introduction. The purpose of this instruction is to set forth procedures to: ensure the safety of National Weather Service (NWS) employees and their dependents during disasters or major weather emergencies; reduce the potential hardships experienced by employees and dependents; and facilitate the evacuation of non-emergency personnel and dependents. This instruction uses the same criteria for defining disasters or major weather emergencies as established under NWS Instruction 1-208, Delegation of Authority for Food/Lodging Expenditures In Advance of or During Major Weather Emergencies or Disasters: “The emergency involves danger to human life or the possibility of destruction of Federal property.”

This policy covers all operational units involved in the provision of warning and forecast services and data collection and dissemination, including but not limited to: Weather Forecast Offices (WFO), River Forecast Centers (RFC), Weather Service Offices (WSO), Data Collection Offices, National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP), Telecommunications Operations Center (TOC), Center Weather Service Units (CWSU), Spaceflight Meteorology Group, Radar Operations Center (ROC), Tsunami Warning Centers, Regional Offices, and National Operational Hydrologic Remote Sensing Center. The NWS officials in charge of these units (e.g. Meteorologist in Charge for WFO) will herein be referred to as “office managers.”

2. Emergency Employees definition:

The NWS has designated “emergency” employees as all employees currently on or scheduled for

operational shift-work positions at field units engaged in: 1) the direct provision of forecasts and warnings, 2) real time collection, processing and distribution of data, products and services, and 3) support to any of these services/programs. In addition, the local supervisor or Financial Management Center (FMC) Director can designate other non-shift staff as emergency employees to ensure continuity of services as the situation warrants.

2.1 Advance Preparations. Employees should make every effort prior to a major weather emergency or disaster to secure their residence/property and to be prepared to evacuate their dependents when directed by local authorities.

- a. Employees are encouraged to have established family evacuation plans in place, including arrangements with friends or relatives outside the immediate service area for temporary residence, if feasible.
- b. Non-emergency employees should plan to evacuate with their family and/or relocate to an appropriate backup office site as may be required by the NWS Region or FMC Director.
- c. Use of evacuation pay and administrative leave is encouraged to ensure the safety of employees and their dependents. See sections 2.2 and 2.3, below.

2.2. Use of Evacuation Pay. When mandatory evacuation orders are in place, NWS employees and their dependents should follow National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) implementing procedures for the use of evacuation pay to assist their safe and efficient evacuation. Evacuation pay can be used by an employee's dependents, even if evacuating without the employee. See Appendix A

2.3. Administrative Leave. The office manager or designee, working in coordination with the FMC Director or designee, is encouraged to grant administrative leave as necessary to provide NWS employees sufficient time to make required preparations for evacuation or to secure their residence/property in advance of, or during, a major event. Administrative leave can be granted in conjunction with, or separate from, evacuation pay. See Appendix A

3. Advance Planning. The following guidance does not supersede existing NWS Continuity of Operations policy (NWS instruction 10-2202, "Operations and Services Readiness – Continuity of Operations"). The intent of this guidance is to supplement the COOP instructions and to promulgate best practices: Offices should establish facility-specific operations contingency plans for major weather emergencies or disasters. These plans should be reviewed annually and filed with the FMC. The plans should address staffing, operations, and backup and take into consideration specific actions for anticipated events with differing onset, durations, and impacts. For example, a plan for a Category 2 hurricane would be different than a plan for a Category 5 hurricane. The establishment of, and subsequent changes to the plans must be implemented in accordance with the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the NWS Employees Organization (NWSEO).

3.1 Continuity of Service and Backup.

National and Regional Headquarters shall:

- a. Provide operational, logistical, and/or technological assistance prior to the onset of extreme conditions (This assistance could include, for example, repair of equipment, delivery of satellite phones, augmentation of staff, etc.).
- b. Provide assistance in maintaining NWS operations (For example, facilitate transfer of services to a neighboring office(s), assist with deployment of staff to a neighboring office(s), etc.).

WFO/RFCs/WSOs/CWSUs/Offices/Centers will:

- a. Maintain delivery of services as long as feasible (Complete infrastructure failure or damage may prevent continued operation and require service backup.)
- b. Provide staffing (local expertise) to a neighboring office(s) to maintain delivery of services (if necessary).
- c. Coordinate among adjacent and or backup offices to ensure integrated evacuation and continuity planning.
- d. To the maximum extent possible, provide for the safety of the employees.

3.2 Consideration of Office Capacities: Office managers should take into consideration the amount of space available in the office/center safe room as well as the overall work load of the office when deciding upon how many emergency staff to retain during the duration of a disaster or major weather emergency. This consideration will help avoid overcrowding or additional hardship or injury. This information is available through each Region's Systems Operations Division and or the NWS Office of Operational Systems.

3.3 Staffing Considerations. Prior to an anticipated prolonged event (for example, a major land falling hurricane with significant infrastructure damage possible in the immediate area where the office/center is located), office managers should evaluate whether to draw down staff to a level that will balance employee safety with the need to maintain NWS services. Additional deployment of staff to backup offices prior to such an event should be considered to provide local expertise and ensure continuity of services.

4. Discretion. Policy and instructions cannot cover every conceivable scenario. Office managers are expected to use their best judgment in making decisions regarding how to maintain the provision of NWS mission responsibilities while protecting the safety of NWS employees and their dependents. Office managers, time permitting, will document the basis for his/her decisions and seek authority from the FMC Director, as appropriate.

APPENDIX A

MEMORANDUM TO: Line and Staff Office Directors

FROM: Eduardo J. Ribas Eduardo J. Ribas, Director
Workforce Management Office

SUBJECT: NOAA Implementing Procedures for Use of Evacuation Pay

The use of Evacuation Pay has been delegated from the Department of Commerce, through VADM Lautenbacher, to Line and Staff Offices. The authority for evacuation payments are broken down into parts: (1) allows for the continuation in pay status at the employee's current rate for the period of time the evacuation order remains in effect, unless terminated earlier, not to exceed 180 days after the effective date of the evacuation order, (2) allows for travel and subsistence payments for employees and their dependents from the date of evacuation to arrival at a safe haven, and (3) allows for advance payments (via electronic funds transfer or cash) not to exceed 30 days to assist in financial hardships associated with the evacuation process. The common theme in these three parts is that an employee must be on a standing MANDATORY evacuation order as declared by Federal, State, or Local Government Officials. Please note that although we technically fall under the title "Federal Official," we (NOAA Management) do not have the authority to issue a MANDATORY evacuation order.

In accordance with this delegation, the following implementing procedures serve for consistent use by all NOAA Line and Staff Offices:

1. Administrative leave/excused absence is the means for keeping employees in pay status where employees are under standing MANDATORY evacuation orders.
2. Travel and subsistence payments (reimbursements) will be authorized for all employees and their dependents from time of the MANDATORY evacuation order until return within a reasonable period once the MANDATORY evacuation orders are lifted. Each Line and Staff Office will be responsible for covering these expenses within their existing funds.

Travel orders must be used for authorization and voucher purposes, however, it is understood that the formal authorization may be processed post evacuation order. Employees must have an approved round-trip travel authorization that covers the employee and his or her dependents. In addition, the order must include a listing of the dependent's names and dates of birth under "Other Authorizations" on the travel authorization, as well as a notation of "Evacuation Travel" under the "Comments" field of the travel authorization. Federal Travel Regulations MUST be followed.

Please note that under evacuation travel, dependents under the age of 12 are entitled to half of the per diem employees and dependents over 12 year of age are entitled. Per diem is further reduced by 60% for the entire family after the first 30 days. Supervisors should be clear on what

will and will not be reimbursed since they are ultimately responsible for ensuring appropriate application of this tool for his or her employee(s), and therefore, must use discretion when approving travel orders and vouchers. Employees who have been authorized to receive these payments may use their Government Issued Travel Card as this is Official Government Travel. For further travel regulation information, please visit the travel web site address at <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/~finance/travel.html>

3. On an as needed basis, we stand ready to provide salary advances, up to 30 days to assist in financial hardships associated with the MANDATORY evacuation order. It is important to note that these advances MUST be repaid by employees and there are no provisions for "writing-off" this debt.

It is important to repeat that in order for any of these parts to be used, an employee must be on a standing MANDATORY evacuation order as declared by Federal, State, or Local Government Official, and WE do not fall under the category, for these purposes, as a "Federal Official." For further information on evacuation pay, and other workforce management flexibilities that can be used during emergency situations, please visit the Workforce Management Office website at <http://www.wfm.noaa.gov>.