



BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Establishment of Warming Center

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to local governments, non-profit, faith-based and community organizations that intend to operate a warming center in the local community. We encourage the use of this document as part of a larger winter weather response strategy.

For purposes of this guidance, a warming center is a facility that is temporarily made available to the general public during extreme temperature conditions. **Centers are not overnight shelters.** They are open for a limited number of hours for a limited number of days and provide limited services. Centers are not day-care for children, the elderly or others who cannot care for themselves. It is assumed that individuals who use the centers can return to their homes when the center is closed.

All elements of this guide might not be relevant or required in all situations. The cause, scope and duration of the incident, the demographics of the community and available resources will drive decisions about the size of the center, hours of operation and services provided.

While this guide contains the most common elements of warming centers, additional consideration might be required. Center operators should tailor this guide to the unique aspects of their jurisdiction.

Before opening a center, operators should consult their legal counsel and insurers to determine if all legal requirements are met and liability issues are covered.

Operations

Facility

Almost any facility can be used as a warming center including:

- libraries
- recreational or community centers
- city hall / courthouse
- places of worship
- senior centers
- legion halls
- bingo halls
- museums
- shopping malls
- movie theaters



Requirements

The Department of Health and Senior Services does not regulate or license warming centers. Operators should ensure that the facility;

- is available to all individuals
- is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) including restrooms
- drop off location is near entrance for those with mobility constraints
- provides parking access
- provides access to drinking water
- provides a safe and secure environment
- has convenient hours of operation
- can accommodate the expected number of individuals
- has lavatory capacity for the expected number of individuals
- has sufficient electrical outlets for charging stations (including medical equipment)
- has refrigeration available for medications
- be in areas frequented by individuals requiring warming
- uses existing facilities known by and already catering to vulnerable individuals
- has access to 911 services

Development of an operational checklist may be beneficial. A sample checklist is attached as Appendix C.

Additionally, staff or volunteers should have excellent interpersonal skills and be able to recognize the [signs and symptoms of a cold related-illness](#).

If possible, staff or volunteers who have been trained in basic first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and automated external defibrillation (AED) should be available during operating hours. Medical services beyond first aid are not provided at warming centers. Access to advanced medical services (i.e. 911) is highly recommended.

Services

Prior to opening a warming center, operators should determine the services that can be provided. Minimal services include tables and chairs, charging area and information updates. If food (beyond snacks) is to be provided, consultation with the local health authorities is especially important before opening a center.

If at all possible, centers should be prepared to accommodate pets. Best practices for accommodating pets include:

- separately spaced seating areas for owners/pets; **dogs must be on a leash and under the control of the owner**
- availability of crates nearby for animals that are harder to control or with owners that are frail
- cats must be in carriers at all times
- provide multiple water dishes scattered throughout the room
- access to a green space outdoors for dogs to relieve themselves and supplies for clean-up



- dogs that are too aggressive towards people or other animals should not be allowed to stay if they present a danger or disruption
- animals need to be healthy or non-contagious if they have medical issues
- no pet food is provided
- have space for people who are afraid of or highly allergic to animals
- availability of backup leashes
- no retractable leashes to prevent animals from wandering and getting entangled
- additional staff/volunteer to monitor to ensure owners are controlling their pets to avoid incidents and injuries

NOTE: Service animals must be allowed to accompany their owners. Under the ADA, a service animal is defined as a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability.

Emotional support, therapy, comfort or companion animals are not considered service animals under the ADA. However, some local governments have laws that allow people to take emotional support animals into public places. Check with your local government agencies to find out about these laws. **Currently Missouri's service dog law does not require owners of public accommodations to allow emotional support animals.**

Communication

An important component to the success of a warming center is communication. Individuals need to know your facility is open and available to them. Development of a communication plan is recommended. This plan can be very simple but should include communication with the local emergency manager as well as appropriate messaging on your organization's website and social media platform. Contact information for all Missouri emergency managers can be found at the bottom of the [State Emergency Management Agency website](#).

Your communication plan should take into consideration the unique needs of the population in your area including those with limited English proficiency, vision and/or hearing challenges, etc.

When to Open a Center

Extreme cold is considered any temperature below freezing (32°). During extreme cold, the body must work harder to regulate normal body temperature and that can lead to illness or death, especially with vulnerable populations.

Development of a protocol which indicates at what specific temperature or National Weather Service (NWS) alert would determine the activation of the warming center is highly recommended. Likewise, development of a protocol for determining when the warming center would deactivate is also recommended. The NWS has developed an Excessive Cold Threat Level matrix that can provide guidance (See Appendix A).



See National Weather Service Definitions below for definitions of winter weather advisories, watches and warnings for counties in Missouri.

Local government staff, public health professionals and other organizations that participate in planning for operation of a warming center should identify the NWS station for their jurisdiction and build relationships with the NWS staff to ensure receiving the most current information available on predicted extreme winter weather events.

National Weather Service Definitions

...WIND CHILL ADVISORY...

Issued when low wind chill temperatures are expected but will not reach local warning criteria. Extremely cold air and strong winds will combine to generate low wind chill readings. See Appendix B for wind chill chart.

... WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY...

Issued when snow, blowing snow, ice, sleet, or a combination of these wintry elements is expected but conditions should not be hazardous enough to meet warning criteria.

... WIND CHILL WATCH...

Issued when there is the potential for a combination of extremely cold air and strong winds to create dangerously low wind chill values.

...WINTER STORM WATCH...

Issued when conditions are favorable for a significant winter storm event (heavy sleet, heavy snow, ice storm, heavy snow and blowing snow or a combination of events).

...WIND CHILL WARNING...

Issued for a combination of very cold air and strong winds that will create dangerously low wind chill values. This level of wind chill will result in frostbite and lead to hypothermia if precautions are not taken.

...WINTER STORM WARNING...

Issued for a significant winter weather event including snow, ice, sleet or blowing snow or a combination of these hazards. Travel will become difficult or impossible in some situations.

A warming center is designed for non-continuous (non 24/7) operation. If a cold related emergency persists and it is not safe for individuals to return to their homes, a shelter might need to be opened.

Sheltering is beyond the scope of this guidance. Center operators should discuss the logistical and legal considerations involved in operating a shelter with their legal counsel and the American Red Cross.



¹ EPA Excessive Heat Events Guidebook, EPA 430-B-06-005. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC

Excessive Cold Threat Level

Appendix A

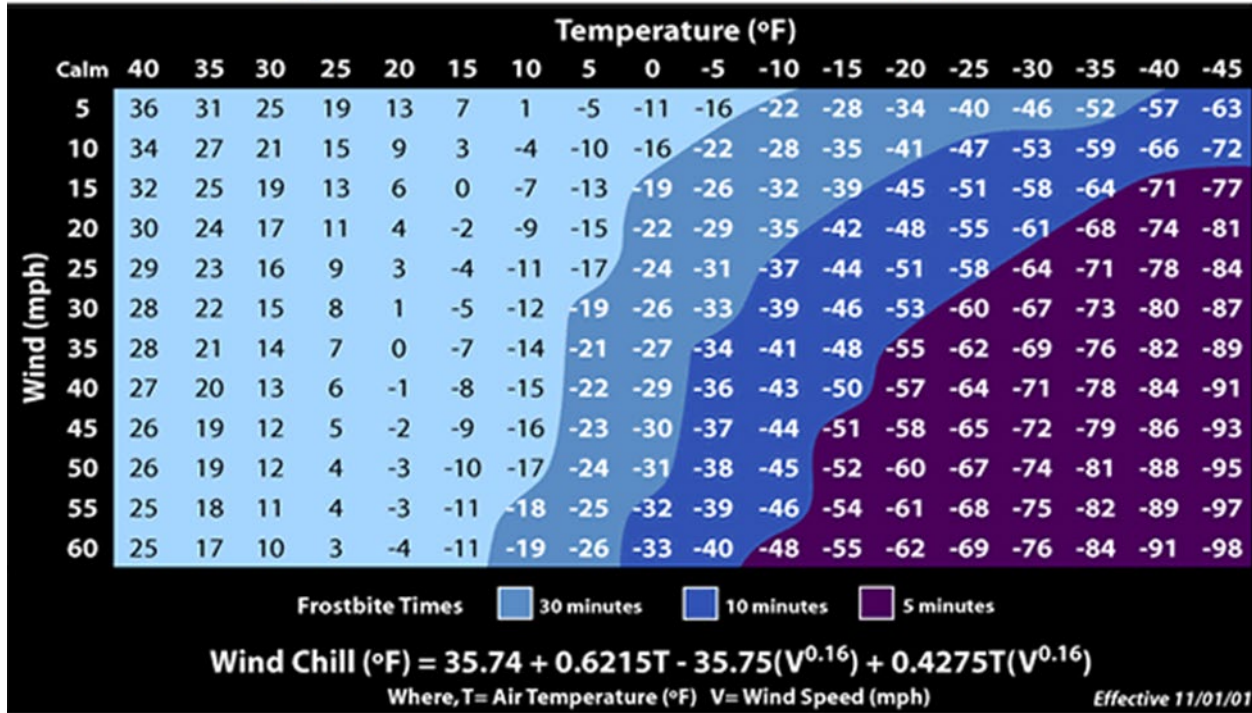
Excessive Cold Threat Level	Threat Level Descriptions
Extreme	"An Extreme Threat to Life and Property from Excessive Cold." Near-record to historic freeze producing temperatures less than 24F...OR...a Wind Chill Warning in effect for dangerous wind chills below 12F...OR...a Winter Storm Warning in effect for significant winter precipitation with snow accumulations greater than 0.50", or sleet accumulation greater than 0.25", or ice accretion on trees/power lines greater than 0.25", or ANY ice accretion on roadways.
High	"A High Threat to Life and Property from Excessive Cold." Hard Freeze conditions with temperatures between 24F-27F for two or more hours...OR...a Wind Chill Warning in effect with lowest wind chills between 12F-20F...OR...a Winter Weather Advisory in effect for snow accumulation of 0.10" to 0.50", or sleet accumulation of 0.10" to 0.25", or ice accretion on trees/powerlines less than 0.25", or glaze of ice on bridges and overpasses.
Moderate	"A Moderate Threat to Life and Property from Excessive Cold." A Frost Advisory in effect with widespread frost coverage greater than 55% within a defined area...OR...freeze conditions with temperatures between 28F-32F for two or more hours...OR...a Wind Chill Advisory in effect with lowest wind chills between 21F-28F...OR...a Winter Weather Advisory in effect for snow accumulations less than 0.10", or sleet accumulations less than 0.10", AND no ice accumulation.
Low	"A Low Threat to Life and Property from Excessive Cold." Areas of frost with coverage 25%-54% within a defined area...OR...near freezing temperatures between 33F-35F...OR...Wind Chill Advisory in effect with lowest wind chills between 29F-35F...OR...flurries (very light snow) with no accumulation.
Very Low	" A Very Low Threat to Life and Property from Excessive Cold." Patchy frost with coverage less than 25% within a defined area...OR...temperatures between 36F-39F.
Non-Threatening	" No Discernable Threat to Life and Property from Excessive Cold." Cold season weather conditions are non-threatening.

Wind Chill Chart

Appendix B



Wind Chill Chart



Warming Center Checklist

Appendix C

The following is a suggested list of important criteria for setting up a warming center. There is no established criteria for warming centers. Additionally, unless a special exemption has been given by the local utilities, facilities used as warming centers are not exempt from rotating outages.

Important Criteria

- Heating with temperature maintained between 70°-72°F
- Accessible to all / ADA compliant
- Ample seating appropriate to the jurisdiction
- Public restrooms accessible to people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs
- Access to potable water (drinking fountain, etc.)
- Access to 911 services
- Publicly advertised
- Parking access
- Proximity to public transit

Suggested Criteria

- Back-up generators
- Secure, facility has security service
- Communications, phone (including TDD/TTY/video capabilities), internet access, sign-language interpreters
- Child friendly with materials for children to play with while at the warming center
- Medical personnel such as nurses and/or aides or personnel trained in CPR and first aid
- Large capacity
- Personal assistance services for people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs
- Available televisions, books, games
- Transportation for those lacking their own, including wheelchair accessible services
- Follow-up procedures for those in need of additional services (health care, social services, etc.)
- Area for pets
- Veterinary resources available if needed