

SHELTERING AND COMFORT CENTER ANNEX

Purpose

The purpose of this Sheltering and Comfort Center Annex is to provide a comprehensive framework for the activation, operation, and coordination of Shelters and Comfort Centers during extreme weather events. These centers serve as vital lifelines for individuals evacuated and who may be particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of extreme temperatures.

Scope and Objectives

This Sheltering and Comfort Centers Annex focuses on coordinating, activating, and sheltering operations during emergencies within Larimer County. It guides the establishment of shelters and comfort centers. It outlines roles and responsibilities, emphasizes ongoing observation and evaluation to enhance response capabilities, and ensures readiness to address evolving community needs.

Situation and Assumptions

The occurrence of a significant event, whether within the region or beyond, may necessitate the utilization of local mutual aid resources. Such events will demand coordinated efforts and support from numerous agencies.

Planning Assumptions:

- Individuals requiring access to Shelters and Comfort Centers may need transportation assistance, particularly those without personal vehicles or who rely on other transportation services.
- Shelters and Comfort Centers must be accessible to individuals with disabilities or special needs, requiring sites that are ADA-compliant as measured by the American Red Cross sheltering standards.
- Shelters and Comfort Centers need to be promptly activated during extreme weather events to provide immediate relief and support to vulnerable populations at risk due to temperature extremes.
- Clear and accurate communication about the availability and location of Comfort Centers is essential to ensure residents are aware of these resources during extreme weather events, mitigating credibility issues with official information sources.
- The combined expertise and capabilities of government, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations may be required to effectively operate Shelters or Comfort Centers.

Concept of Operations

A. Definitions

Shelter: A facility or location that provides temporary overnight protection, housing, and basic services for individuals or groups displaced or impacted by a disaster or emergency.

Evacuation Center: An evacuation center is a place set up to provide temporary shelter, basic needs like food and water, and sometimes medical care for people who have been forced to leave their homes due to an emergency or disaster. It's a safe and organized location where evacuees can stay until it's safe to return home or until more permanent arrangements can be made. An Evacuation Center is not open overnight.

Evacuation Point: An evacuation point is a designated location where people gather during an emergency evacuation, especially when they need to leave a dangerous area quickly. It's a safe spot away from the danger zone where evacuees can receive further instructions and assistance.

Comfort Center - A designated facility that provides temporary relief and assistance during periods of extreme weather conditions, such as heatwaves or cold spells. These centers offer a safe, climate-controlled environment, essential supplies, and often, additional services like hydration, medical attention, and social support.

B. Comfort Center Activation Thresholds

Extreme Temperature Warnings:

- **Heat:** Excessive Heat Warnings or Heat Advisories are issued by the National Weather Service or local authorities.
- **Cold:** Extreme Cold Warnings or Wind Chill Warnings are issued by the National Weather Service or local authorities.

Prolonged Extreme Weather:

- **Heat:** A heat wave is forecasted to last for an extended period, posing a significant risk to public health. Reports of heat-related illnesses or deaths, power outages affecting air conditioning systems, or other community health concerns emerge.
- **Cold:** A cold spell is expected to persist, with temperatures remaining below freezing for an extended period. Reports of hypothermia, frostbite, or other cold-related health issues are received, or power outages affecting heating systems are widespread.

C. Activation Thresholds For When An Evacuation Center Becomes A Shelter

Duration of the Emergency: If the emergency or disaster is expected to last for an extended period, beyond the initial evacuation phase, authorities may decide to convert evacuation centers into shelters to provide longer-term accommodation and support.

D. Coordination and Communication Procedures

Effective coordination and communication are essential for the successful implementation of this plan. Key procedures include:

- Establishing clear lines of communication between all stakeholders involved in sheltering and Comfort Center operations.
- Utilizing various communication channels, including radio, telephone, internet, and social media, to disseminate information and updates to the public.
- Implementing a Joint Information Center (JIC) to manage public information and media relations during emergencies as necessary.
- Conducting regular briefings and meetings to ensure all stakeholders are informed and aligned with response efforts.
- Establishing protocols for sharing information and coordinating resources with neighboring jurisdictions and state agencies.

E. Activation and Alert Procedures and Thresholds

Timely activation and alert procedures are critical for ensuring the safety and well-being of residents during emergencies. Key procedures include:

- Establishing clear criteria and thresholds for activating Comfort centers based on forecasted weather conditions and temperature extremes. Additional decision support information regarding Comfort Centers via the National Weather Service can be found at <https://www.weather.gov/bou/WarmingShelter>.
- Notifying residents of center openings, closures, and other pertinent information.
- Providing translation services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who do not speak English.

F. Facility Selection

To ensure the efficient establishment and activation of facilities designated as any of the above-mentioned, the following needs to be considered. To the best of our ability, Facility Selection and pre-approval should be completed prior to an incident in order to support efficient, safe, and rapid activation of facility needs.

- Identifying suitable locations based on accessibility, capacity, and proximity to vulnerable populations.
- Coordinating with facility owners and managers to secure appropriate shelter sites and obtain necessary permits.
- Preparing designated facilities with essential resources, including bedding, food, water, medical supplies, and hygiene facilities.
- Activating shelters promptly upon receiving notification of an emergency or disaster event.
- Deploying trained personnel to manage and staff facilities, including volunteers, medical professionals, and security personnel.
- Conducting ongoing assessments to monitor facility capacity, resource availability, and evacuee needs.

- Implementing protocols for admitting evacuees, including registration, health screenings, and security measures.
- Providing regular updates and communication to evacuees regarding facility operations, services, and recovery efforts.

G. Facility Management

Effective shelter management is essential for ensuring the safety, security, and well-being of the community. Key aspects of management include:

- Establishing clear lines of authority and communication within the facility management team.
- Assigning specific roles and responsibilities to staff, including supervisors, logistics coordinators, and support personnel.
- Implementing procedures for managing shelter operations, including intake, registration, feeding, and medical care.
- Providing security measures to ensure the safety of community members, staff, and facilities.
- Offering support services, including behavioral health counseling, spiritual care, and incident assistance.
- Collaborating with local agencies and organizations to address the unique needs of vulnerable populations, including individuals with disabilities, elderly persons, and families with children.
- Conducting regular assessments to evaluate facility conditions, resource availability, and evacuee satisfaction.
- Maintaining accurate records of facility occupancy, services provided, and resources expended for reporting and reimbursement purposes.
- Establishing clear lines of communication between facilities and active Emergency Operations Centers.

H. Facility Demobilization and Recovery

As the emergency or disaster event subsides and conditions improve, facilities must be demobilized in an orderly and systematic manner. Key steps in shelter demobilization and recovery include:

- Conducting assessments to determine when it is safe and appropriate to close facilities.
- Communicating closure plans and procedures to the community, staff, and partner agencies in advance.
- Arrange transportation assistance for community members as needed to return home or access alternative housing options.
- Coordinating with local agencies and organizations to provide follow-up support services to evacuees, including case management, housing assistance, and referrals to community resources.
- Conducting debriefings and after-action reviews to identify lessons learned, best practices, and areas for improvement in sheltering operations.

- Documenting and reporting sheltering activities, including shelter occupancy, services provided, and resources expended, for reimbursement and reporting purposes.
- Restoring shelter facilities to their pre-event condition and conducting post-event assessments to identify and address any damage or issues.

Roles and Responsibilities

In the execution of this Sheltering and Comfort Center Annex, various stakeholders assume specific roles and responsibilities to ensure effective coordination and implementation.

Emergency Management:

- Coordinate with other agencies to ensure adequate resources and personnel are available.
- Establish and maintain communication channels with all agencies and the public.
- Request from support agencies with the activation of shelters, evacuation centers, and Comfort Centers.
- Provide for or identify partners to staff and operate required facilities.
- Coordinate with emergency response personnel regarding facility needs.

Law Enforcement:

- Coordinate with other agencies to address any criminal activity or public safety concerns at facilities.
- Assist with crowd control and traffic management, if necessary at facilities.
- Establish Evacuation Points
- Request an Evacuation Center or Shelter from Emergency Management

Larimer Health and Environment:

- Monitor the sanitary conditions of the shelter and implement cleaning protocols.
- Address any public health concerns.
- Review shelter locations both before emergencies and during as required.

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD):

- Identify and coordinate the availability of resources, including personnel, equipment, and supplies to support sheltering and comfort center operations.
- Recruit, train, and deploy volunteers to assist with various tasks, such as registration, distribution, and cleanup.
- Assist in the establishment and operation of emergency shelters and comfort centers.

Plan Maintenance and Review

To ensure its effectiveness, the Sheltering and Comfort Center Annex will be reviewed as needed. Periodic updates will be made to reflect legislative changes, technological advancements, and lessons learned from past activations. This plan shall reside within the Larimer County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP).

APPROVAL SIGNATURES

The EOC Management Annex has hereby been reviewed and approved by the Director for the Larimer County Office of Emergency Management this 3rd day of March, 2025, and will be added to the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan for Larimer County.

BY: 
Lori R. Hodges, Director Office of Emergency Management