

Portage Prepares

Helping Portage County Citizens prepare for emergencies and disasters.

Winter Weather Preparedness for Schools



Office of Homeland Security &
Emergency Management

Ryan Shackelford, Director

330-297-3607

Board of County Commissioners

Maureen T. Frederick, President
Kathleen Chandler, Vice President
Vicki A. Kline, Board Member



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Children can be especially susceptible to the dangers associated with winter weather. Their youthful enthusiasm often takes over when commonsense and safety should prevail.

Parents should stay informed of winter weather and school closings by listening to daily reports on local radio or television stations.

Parents and school administrators should review the following winter safety tips with their students who walk to and from the bus stops or schools:

- Dress appropriately for cold weather: sweaters, pants, winter coats, hats, scarves, socks and boots
- Allow extra travel time to get to the bus stop or school
- Wear bright jackets or coats so bus drivers can easily see you in the morning or evening
- Stand at least 10 steps away (or back) from bus stops. Buses need extra room to stop where there is snow or ice
- Do not walk or play on snow mounds or ice within 10 feet of the roadway - you could fall and slip into the roadway and be at risk of being struck by a vehicle
- Do not cross the street at your bus stop until all traffic has come to a complete stop and the bus driver has signaled that it is safe to cross

Gather Information

- Know where to get weather information. Invest in buying a **NOAA Weather Radio** or **Public Alert Radio**. Use local media sources such as TV or radio stations, the Internet and paging services.
- Know how and where to get road information. Police and media traffic reports, city and county transportation officials, and security teams are excellent sources. The Ohio Department of Transportation's Buckeye Traffic provides Ohio travelers with up-to-date information on road conditions, traffic, construction and other activities affecting roadways managed by ODOT.



Activating the Plan

- Determine when to activate plan. Gather information about the type of winter storm, expected impact, and time of impact on the **school** district. The primary decision will be whether to cancel, delay or hold classes as usual.
- In weather watch situations, immediate action will usually not be required.
- When a warning or advisory is issued, assess the weather situation by monitoring National Weather Service (NWS) forecasts, current weather conditions and road conditions.
- Many homes have parents who work outside of the home. It may be necessary for some children to be brought to school earlier than usual. **Schools** may need to make provisions to allow students inside school buildings during extremely cold weather.

Alerting Students and Staff

- Announce the weather emergency and inform students and staff to take action. Use mobile communication for bus drivers and a PA (public address) system for school staff and students.



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Canceling or Delaying Classes

- Determine when to cancel or delay classes. How much time do you have before the storm impacts the area? Not only must students be transported to schools safely, but also back to their homes by bus, car or on foot.
- What kind of an impact will the storm make? Will roads be impassable, or will road conditions just have a minimal effect on transportation of students, causing only slight delays?



School Transportation Administrator

- Establish communication channels with road maintenance supervisors about changing weather or road conditions.
- Establish communication channels with surrounding districts, and monitor road conditions outside of the district if buses have to travel there.
- Have an emergency preparedness plan that calls in extra drivers and designates spare vehicles ready to cover routes that are significantly delayed.
- Make certain that all district vehicles have a means of communication with a central dispatch point.
- Use only vehicles that have appropriate tires and equipment for inclement weather.
- Provide training for drivers on defensive driving styles that are appropriate for inclement weather and poor road surfaces.
- Install weather channel monitoring equipment at the central dispatch point.
- Be prepared to reroute specific buses if roads are impassable.

School Bus Driver Actions

- For heavy snow or blowing and drifting snow: Be prepared to select an alternate route if directed by radio.
- Stay up-to-date on the latest forecast and maintain communication with school officials.
- For ice storms: Remain alert for downed trees, utility lines and other road hazards.
- Be familiar with alternate routes. Stay up-to-date on the forecasts and maintain communication with school officials.
- For extreme cold: Learn to recognize and treat symptoms of hypothermia and frostbite.
- Be alert for pedestrians who may be using roadways when sidewalks are inaccessible.
- Leave extra following distance and use conservative speeds that allow for an assured clear distance ahead.
- Avoid sudden turns, braking or accelerations that could lead to a loss of vehicular control.
- Insist that passengers observe riding behaviors that do not distract the driver.
- Communicate with school dispatcher about anything unusual, delays, or impassable roads.



Safety Instructions

- Educate school staff and students. Conduct drills and hold safety programs annually.
- Participate in Winter Weather Awareness Week campaigns.
- Contact your local emergency management agency or National Weather Service office for a speaker to discuss winter weather safety.