

Complete Policy Title

Storm Emergency Policy

Policy Number (if applicable):

Approved by

President and Vice Presidents

Date of Most Recent Approval

December 5, 2022

Date of Original Approval(s)

November 1997

Supersedes/Amends Policy dated

November 24, 2020

November 5, 2019

January 2015

Responsible Executive

Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

Policy Specific Enquiries

[Vice-President \(Administration\)](#)

General Policy Enquiries

[Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)

DISCLAIMER:

If there is a discrepancy between this electronic policy and the written copy held by the policy owner, the written copy prevails.

INTRODUCTION

1. The University will close because of severe weather when normal operation would pose a danger to students, staff and faculty (including Mohawk students at the Institute for Applied Health Sciences) while on campus or would prevent large numbers of them from coming to campus or returning safely to their homes.

PURPOSE

2. When the University is closed:
 - a) Classes and academic programs are cancelled, except clinical placement in health professional programs, which continue to operate, at the discretion of the education program;
 - b) meetings and other scheduled events are cancelled;
 - c) all areas and operations not defined as “essential” are closed, including those scheduled to take place in remote format;
 - d) examinations are cancelled and rescheduled;
 - e) deadlines for student assignments and other submissions due on a closed day are postponed until the same hour on the next academic day on which the University is not closed;
 - f) deadlines for job applications and other employment requirements are postponed to the same time on the next business day on which the University is not closed.

SCOPE

3. This policy applies to the campus locations within the City of Hamilton and City of Burlington. Regional campuses will follow the direction of local affiliated universities.
4. This policy does not apply to students attending a placement at a non-McMaster campus location. These students are asked to follow the direction of their placement supervisors or employers, unless directed otherwise by their education program.

DECISION TO CLOSE

5. If Hamilton is affected by a major storm, the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) “the Provost” [or in their absence, the Deputy Provost, or in their absence, the Vice-President (Operations & Finance)], in consultation with Security Services, Facilities Services and Communications will make the decision to close the University.
6. **In the absence of a communicated decision to close, the University remains open and all activities continue as planned.** At all times, individuals should assess their personal safety in deciding about whether to come to work or class.

7. Employees, other than those employed in “essential services”, as defined in this policy, are not expected to be at work, but are paid for a normal day. “Employees”, for the purposes of this policy, includes all staff and faculty.

COMMUNICATION

8. The information will be coordinated by Communications and communicated via the University’s:
 - a) Daily News website <https://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/>;
 - b) home page www.mcmaster.ca;
 - c) social media sites: <https://www.facebook.com/mcmasteruniversity>, <https://twitter.com/mcmasteru>, <https://www.instagram.com/mcmasteru/> and <https://www.linkedin.com/school/mcmaster-university/>;
 - d) McMaster University Safety App.
9. Local Hamilton media will be notified. No one other than Communications, Marketing & Public Affairs is authorized to call the media about the closing of McMaster University, and local radio and TV have been asked not to pay attention to other calls.
10. Individual departments may arrange for staff to be telephoned, but the University has no obligation to telephone staff to notify them that the University is closed. Individual staff, faculty, and students are responsible for checking local radio stations or the University website www.mcmaster.ca on stormy days. If there is no specific announcement about McMaster University, the University remains open. Staff, faculty and students are advised not to overload the telephone system by calling the University for information about a storm closing.

DELEGATION

11. Directors and others mentioned in this Policy may name a delegate or alternate to take action in their stead. Communications, Marketing & Public Affairs will maintain a current list of individuals to be consulted or notified about closings, with telephone numbers. When a decision by the Provost is required and the Provost is not available, the decision shall be made by the Deputy Provost or the Vice-President (Operations & Finance).

ESSENTIAL SERVICES

12. Even when the University is closed, it is home for some 3,000 people, chiefly students in residence, and some services must be maintained for their care and for the protection of life and property.
13. The following operations are defined as “essential services” to be kept in operation even when the University is closed:

- a) Security Services;
 - b) Food service in the residences, as designated by Hospitality Services;
 - c) CAF;
 - d) Housing & Conference Services;
 - e) Staff providing patient care (for example, medical clinics at the David Braley Health Sciences Centre);
 - f) Powerhouse;
 - g) Nuclear Reactor & related Health Physics services;
 - h) Snow Removal (grounds crew);
 - i) Emergency repair and maintenance;
 - j) University Technology Services.
14. Staff to provide essential services will be so designated by the department heads (or delegates) responsible for those services. Staff in these areas not designated “essential” are not covered by this designation. Department heads are responsible for assigning duties to be carried out and making reasonable arrangements for the protection of essential staff. Department heads will take into account individuals’ needs in assigning duties for “essential services”.
15. No department can designate any other services as “essential” or require staff to work during a “closed” period without approval from the Provost or the Vice-President (Operations & Finance).

CLASSES AND EXAMINATIONS

16. Classes will not be held during closed periods, and assignment deadlines occurring on a closed day will be extended to the same time on the next academic day. When exams are affected, where possible, exams will be rescheduled to the following Sunday during the exam session.

EMPLOYEE PAYMENT ON CLOSED DAYS

17. Unless stated differently in an applicable collective agreement, Employees are paid for scheduled time during which the University is closed, regardless of whether they are at work or not. Employees who are required to work providing essential services during a closed period are entitled to equivalent time off at a later date at straight time rates.
18. An Employee member who is on vacation, sick leave or unpaid leave, or who is not scheduled to work on a day when the University is closed is not entitled to equivalent time off later. In the event of a closure until

noon, employees scheduled for work commencing prior to noon are not expected to come in for any portion of their shift after noon.

19. Employees who come to work and find out on arrival that the University is closed may leave if they wish. In the event that there is no productive work to be accomplished, staff may be sent home at the discretion of their supervisor. In making such a decision, a supervisor will take into account the provisions of the [McMaster University Risk Management Manual RMM # 304 \(Working Alone Program\)](#). Staff who come to work and work a portion of their scheduled work-day are entitled to time off at a later date at straight time rates equal to the amount of time actually worked.

TIMING OF CLOSING

20. **When a decision is made to close the University in the early morning, the duration of the closing will be specified.** In the event that the duration of the closure is for less than a full academic business day, any subsequent decision to extend the closure for the balance of the day and evening will be made and communicated at least one hour prior to the announced end of the closure period. In the event of a closure for less than a full academic/business day, only those events, shifts, or activities scheduled to commence after the re-opening time will proceed as scheduled. Every effort will be made to confirm a closing by 5:30 a.m.
21. The University will occasionally need to close after classes and business hours have started for the day. A decision to close during the day will be made by the Provost. A decision to close during the day will specify whether the closing is “immediate” or at a stated hour. Unless otherwise specified, the closing continues from that hour until the beginning of work on the next day. A class or examination that would continue past the specified closing hour is cancelled in its entirety.
22. When such a decision is made, it will be communicated as follows:
“At [the designated hour], staff and faculty (except those carrying out essential services) are entitled to leave for home, without loss of pay. Department heads have discretion to permit staff and faculty to leave sooner.”
23. Faculty and Administrative Units will be responsible for sharing this communication when such a notice is posted.

CLOSING OUTSIDE NORMAL BUSINESS HOURS

24. Any closing that involves the cancellation of evening classes will be determined during the working day according to the procedure described above.
25. If weather conditions justify closing the campus during late evening so that any night shift staff are not required to come to work, the decision will be made by the Provost, in consultation with Security Services, Facilities and Communications. Communications will initiate the appropriate communication procedure.

Such a closing is effective until the next morning, by which time a decision will be made whether the University will be closed for any portion of the following day.

26. If weather conditions justify the closing of the campus on a Saturday, Sunday or holiday, the Provost in consultation with Security Services, Facilities and Communications will make the decision which will be communicated as outlined above.
27. Security Services will also notify a designated person in each department that is known to have activities scheduled or staff on duty outside of normal business hours.
28. Any or unit department (such as the Library) that has scheduled activities, or staff scheduled for duty overnight or on a weekend day or holiday, is responsible for notifying Security Services of an emergency contact person. Such a department is also responsible for maintaining its own plan for notifying staff when the decision is made to close the campus. The principles set out in this Policy regarding payment of staff will apply.

NON-CLOSURE

29. Weather conditions can sometimes be intimidating even though the University remains open. Employees who live at some distance from the campus may be particularly affected. Consistent with any applicable collective agreement, time not worked due to storm conditions, but when the University is open, will be accounted for through vacation time, accumulated time, personal leave day, emergency unpaid leave day via Employment Standards or flexible working hours or flexible work scheduling arrangements.
30. In such circumstances, Employees may also adjust to work remotely or through hybrid format, with appropriate supervisor consultation and approval. Supervisors will need to balance any requests with the need to maintain the service levels and work delivery that is normally expected.
31. Students with concerns about the safety of travelling should contact their instructor, supervisor, or program for direction.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES TO ASSIST THOSE STRANDED ON CAMPUS

32. Emergency procedures will be put in place where appropriate. Refer to the *Storm Emergency Procedures* document.

RELATED PROCEDURES OR DOCUMENTS

- [McMaster University Risk Management Manual RMM # 304 \(Working Alone Program\)](#)