

## **6.09 OFFICE CLOSINGS IN EMERGENCIES**

It is the policy of Austin County to consider the safety of employees as a priority when dealing with an emergency closing. Situations include, but are not limited to, inclement weather and emergency situations such as a power failure, computer failure, flooding, ice, fire, a natural gas leak, etc., which create undesirable and/or unsafe conditions for employees.

The County Judge will communicate with the Commissioners. Once a decision is made, the County Judge will notify the Elected Officials and Department Heads of any closings or delays to be communicated to their employees. In the event that a situation occurs during non-working hours that would necessitate emergency closings of Austin County offices/departments, local radio and television stations will be asked, by the county judge's order, to broadcast an official courthouse closing statement. A general notification call will be placed to the phone numbers on the county list.

Many county departments are continuous operating public safety and service departments. Many county personnel will be required to work during emergency closings. Each department head is responsible for designating their own employees and providing alternate information to personnel designated as essential during emergency closings. Public safety will be foremost in the development of departmental emergency action plans.

Non-Essential employees are responsible for the following activities:

- Must call the Emergency Operations Center or a designated hotline for return to duty information;
- Must remain in contact with their supervisor regarding assignments and return to duty information;
- Must stay abreast of the emergency situation by monitoring radio/television/internet for instructions.

In the event there is an official emergency closing of all County operations ordered by Commissioners Court, due to a disaster by state or county declaration, all essential employees (exempt or non-exempt) required to remain at work will be compensated for straight-time or actual time worked for the duration of the emergency closing for all documented time during which work is performed. Straight-time and overtime will be determined in accordance with the applicant's pre-disaster policies, which shall be applied consistently in both disaster and non-disaster situations.

Any employee who is scheduled off on paid leave (vacation leave, sick leave, comp, holiday or other leave); unpaid leave ( FMLA or disciplinary leave without pay, sick ); or is not scheduled to work that day due to their work schedule during a period of emergency closure, shall have their leave recorded as requested prior to the emergency.

Employees will have one of three classifications and will be noted on their job descriptions:

**NON-ESSENTIAL EMERGENCY.** These are the clerical, judicial, maintenance personnel in the county offices who are not needed during an emergency and should stay home when the County Judge has ordered that their county office be closed. The County Judge will specify which county offices are closed.

**NON-ESSENTIAL, MADE “ESSENTIAL” by Department Head.** Those individuals who are normally part of #1 above, but who, by direction of their department head, or with approval of their department head, are deemed to be essential to the county even when the county is closed, will be considered ESSENTIAL for that specific occasion. These employees will be compensated with other time for time worked.

For Example:

These individuals will be granted “OTHER TIME” for each hour they work. If they are at work for two hours, they get two hours OTHER TIME. If they are there 14 hours, they get 14 hours OTHER TIME – WHICH IS STRAIGHT TIME credit to be used later.

**ESSENTIAL personnel (EMS, SO, R&B).** Those who, by the nature of their jobs, are expected to work scheduled shifts AND MORE IF NEEDED during emergencies unless there are special circumstances, will not receive “other time” for time worked, unless it is determined by the department head that the employee is unable to come to work due to safety concerns, in which case the department head may grant “other time” in extenuating circumstances.

Any essential employee who is scheduled off or is scheduled to be on paid leave may be required to return to work immediately during an emergency. Any essential employee who fails to report to work as scheduled or instructed by the Department Head during inclement weather or disaster may be subject to disciplinary action.

Any employee who fails to report to work as scheduled during a “disaster declaration” may be subject to disciplinary action, if such employee is necessary to provide for the safety and well-being of the general public or the employee is otherwise necessary for the restoration of vital services.