

November 2014 Trustee Tip of the Month

Winter's Coming – Does Your Library Have an Inclement Weather Policy?

Winter weather can prove a challenge when it comes to balancing the need to be open for the public with the safety of patrons and library staff. Adopting an Inclement Weather policy that addresses how your library will handle inclement weather situations well before hazardous weather occurs can prevent confusion for staff and patrons when Old Man Winter or his other seasonal pals come to call.

What an Inclement Weather Policy Should Include

Inclement weather policies should address the when, who and how of closing the library due to hazardous conditions: **when** the library will close for hazardous weather conditions, **who** decides the library will close, and **how** patrons, staff and board members will be notified of the library's closing.

Deciding when the library will close for weather is the most difficult aspect of creating an inclement weather policy. Some libraries refer to other community agencies when making the decision: community colleges, local government offices, or city school systems are some of the local agencies libraries use as guidelines. Factors specific to your library should also be considered, such as whether your facility's parking lot and sidewalks can be adequately treated to ensure patron and staff safety.

Knowing who will make the call to close the library is also key to preventing confusion. The library director often makes the decision, either alone or by polling board members.

Getting the Word Out When You're Closed

The goal of closing the library for hazardous weather is to prevent staff and patron injury -- having a system in place to let your users and staff know as far ahead of time as possible that the library will be closed is essential.

Staff should be notified of library closings **at least two hours before they are expected to report for duty** whenever possible. Poll staff members well ahead of time to determine the best way to notify them of closings.

Television and radio snow closing announcements should be utilized to notify the public of closures, but don't forget to post information to the library's website and social media accounts, too – when in doubt, your patrons will probably check these first. If your library's phone system allows for a pre-recorded message after hours, put closings on this message, as well.

Before bad weather begins, let staff and patrons know the possibility for closures exists. Share your policy with employees **at least once a year** so that they are aware of how inclement weather closures will be handled – how they will be notified, and how these closings will be handled as far as use of personal or sick time, if applicable. Post notices in your library and on your library's website letting the public know that you may be closed in the event of hazardous weather conditions, along with information about how patrons will be notified if the library is closed (i.e. TV, radio, internet).