

# **Somerset County Emergency Operations Plan**

## **ATTACHMENT C - SEVERE WINTER STORMS**

### **I. NATURE OF THE HAZARD**

In Somerset County, there have been four federally-declared winter storm beginning with the ice storm of 1998. The worst storm in the past decade occurred in January, 1998, causing \$1.3 million in damage throughout the entire County. Most winter storms in the County are blizzards that overwhelm highway snow removal operations and cause localized power outages. Frost heaves also cause damage to local roads. Winter storms can cause injuries or loss of life due to delayed responses from emergency services, the improper use of back-up heat sources, debris falling on an individual, or from storm-related vehicle accidents resulting from icy conditions, road wash-outs or erosion. Major winter storms can shut down businesses, resulting in major losses of income to local businesses and individuals. A severe winter storm has been rated as the #2 hazard profiled in the Somerset County All-Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Winter brings frequent record snowfalls and ice buildup. It also brings heavy tourism for snowmobiling, skiing, and ice fishing. Winter quickly changes to spring with tourists arriving for white water rafting, spring fishing and camping. This rapid season change to spring often brings rapid snow and ice melt, leading to ice jams and flood runoff conditions.

In the northern portion of the county lies the mountain regions with the noted peaks of Mount Bigelow on the southern and most western border as well as Squaw, Fletcher, Johnson, Pierce, Spencer, Heald, Bald, Owl's Head Sally, Moxie, the Bald Mountain range, Culcussa and Mucalsea Mountains. In the heavily forested northern portion of the county, both the Penobscot and St. John Rivers begin their trek towards the sea through two adjoining counties, Aroostook and Penobscot. These mountains receive record snow contributing to heavy spring snow melt and water runoff into the various water basins. Sometimes there is very little transition time from the ice and snow melt to mid season to the dry summer.

### **II. RISK AREA**

Somerset County is very much subject to severe winter storm events. There are two destructive weather patterns that occur between the mountains in the northern portion of the county to the foothills in the southern region. The Southwest section of the county is more likely to experience ice storms as opposed to the northern sections of the County. The entire County is very susceptible to blizzards, but especially in northern section and in the mountainous area.

### **III. DIRECTION AND CONTROL**

Each municipality will be responsible for conducting debris clearance and snow removal from the municipal maintained roadways and the Maine Department of Transportation is responsible for the same on state-maintained highways. Snow removal is a normal operation of municipalities in Somerset County and there are no mutual aid agreements for snow removal between communities. During a major snow storm, either additional resources will be contracted or the removal times will be lengthened. Municipal fire departments may be used to help clear tree debris from roadways.

During the Ice Storm of 1998, the Maine National Guard and Maine Department of Transportation assisted the municipalities. To acquire state resources for debris clearance, each municipality will provide resource requests to the Somerset County EMA. The County EMA will forward the requests to the Maine Emergency Management Agency.

# Somerset County Emergency Operations Plan

## ATTACHMENT C - SEVERE WINTER STORMS

### IV. COMMUNICATIONS

Communications will be maintained between the Somerset County Communications Center, the Somerset County EMA office, the first responders and the municipal officers. A major blizzard or ice storm could down telephone transmission lines and even drop cellular and radio towers, as happened periodically during Ice Storm 98. It is not likely however, that all phone, cell phone and radio transmission resources will be out simultaneously over the entire county for lengthy periods of time.

### V. WARNING

The National Weather Service (NWS) will provide Winter Storm Warning and Watches via the NOAA Weather Radios and local radio and television stations. Most winter storms in Maine do not come about as surprises. The problem usually comes when people or communities simply do not begin preparations. Information is provided for Central and Southern Somerset through Gray NWS office and Northern Somerset through the NWS in Caribou.

A Winter Storm Watch indicates that severe winter weather may affect your area.

A Winter Storm Warning indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way.

A Blizzard Warning means that large amounts of falling or blowing snow and sustained winds of at least 35 miles per hour are expected for several hours.

### VI. EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION

Because a Maine winter storm typically effects a large section of the state, the Maine Emergency Management Agency and the two Maine-based National Weather Service Stations will contact local radio and television stations to notify the public of the expected severity and conditions of the winter storm, instructions on how to prepare for storm and the status of road closures.

### VII. EVACUATION

Evacuations are not expected to occur as a result of a severe winter storm. Individuals may need to relocate from their homes if they loss power and have no backup heat source. A nursing home or an elderly resident may need assistance from the Somerset County EMA or American Red Cross in order to evacuate to other facilities. This limited evacuation will not cause traffic congestion anywhere in the County.

### VIII. MASS CARE

Tourist populations during the winter months are minor. Shelters may need to be opened to provide heated shelter or eating stations for those affected by the storm. However, even during Ice Storm 1998, there were very few people in the County that stayed in shelters.

These cases of sheltering will be managed by the Mid Maine County Chapter of the American Red Cross Waterville. If the numbers are limited, these people may be sheltered in area commercial lodging. If the numbers are sufficiently high, then mass care facilities will be established outside the danger areas.

# **Somerset County Emergency Operations Plan**

## **ATTACHMENT C - SEVERE WINTER STORMS**

### **IX. HEALTH AND MEDICAL**

The Somerset County EMA will contact local area EMS units to determine if road blockages are causing delays in emergency transports.

### **X. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

Municipalities will contact the County EMA office when requesting resources.