



Closure of Trunk Highways for Severe Storms or Natural Disasters Policy

Policy # OE015
Revised: 2-22-2023

Policy Owners:

- Director, Office of Maintenance/State Maintenance Engineer
- Transportation System Management and Operations Director

Policy Contacts:

- State Maintenance Engineer
- Transportation System Management and Operations Director

Policy Statement

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) makes every effort, within the limits of available resources, to keep trunk highways open to traffic at all times. However, MnDOT restricts the use of or closes trunk highways for severe storms or natural disasters when vehicular travel is unsafe, or the road is impassable, which may include:

- Drifting and/or blowing snow
- Poor visibility for a prolonged period
- Freezing rain
- Mudslides
- Flooding
- Downed trees/power lines or debris
- Road damage/washout

The primary purpose of MnDOT's transportation system is to support mobility and facilitate commerce. The primary considerations for determining when to close a trunk highway are the safety of motorists, MnDOT employees, the State Patrol, and other emergency services. When considering whether to restrict the use of, or close, a trunk highway, MnDOT must balance the need for mobility with safety. To ensure consistency for trunk highway closures across the state, MnDOT has developed the [Closure of Trunk Highways for Severe Storms or Natural Disasters Guidance](#).

Note: The State Patrol has authority to close a segment of the trunk highway in response to a crash(es) or another emergency. See the [Open Roads Agreement](#) for additional information about the State Patrol's and MnDOT's responsibilities.

Reason for Policy

[Minnesota Statutes §160.27, subdivision 8](#), grants the commissioner the authority to “restrict the use of, or close, any state trunk highway for the protection and safety of the public or for the protection of the highway

from damage during and after storms if there is a danger of the road becoming impassable or if visibility is so limited that safe travel is unlikely.”

This policy assigns responsibilities and establishes guidance to ensure consistency for trunk highway closures across the state.

Applicability

All MnDOT employees must comply with MnDOT policies.

Key stakeholders with responsibilities under this policy include:

- MnDOT Area Maintenance Engineers
- District Maintenance Superintendents
- Subarea Supervisors
- Maintenance Personnel (e.g., Snowplow Operators)
- District communications and public engagement staff
- State Patrol

Definitions

Emergency

A threat to public health, welfare, or safety that threatens the function of government, the protection of property, or the health or safety of people.

Responsibilities

The following section provides primary, high-level responsibilities that must be assigned within each MnDOT district – recognizing that District Engineers and Office Directors have discretion in determining the specific roles, responsibilities, and job descriptions of their staff positions. See also: [Closure of Trunk Highways for Severe Storms or Natural Disasters Guidance](#).

MnDOT Area Maintenance Engineers

- Collaborate with the District Maintenance Superintendent to determine when a trunk highway should be closed or re-opened.
- Notify the District Engineer of the trunk highway closure and re-opening.
- Assist the District Maintenance Superintendent, as needed.
- Review post-storm evaluations and update district systems and operational procedures, as needed.

District Maintenance Superintendents

- Collaborate with the Area Maintenance Engineer to determine when a trunk highway should be closed or re-opened. (Note: If the AME is unavailable, the District Maintenance Superintendent shall collaborate with the District Engineer. If both the AME and DE are unavailable, the District Maintenance Superintendent may make the determination and inform the AME and DE.)
- Collaborate with and coordinate the trunk highway closure and re-opening with District State Patrol Captain(s).

- Collaborate with and coordinate the trunk highway closure and re-opening with impacted Tribal Nations, adjacent MnDOT districts and subareas, and the Department of Transportation of any adjacent state that will be directly affected by a closure.
- Notify the District Public Affairs Coordinator about the trunk highway closure and re-opening.
- Ensure that the road condition notification on 511 is accurate (i.e., “closed,” “no travel advised,” etc.).

Subarea Supervisors

- Monitor road and weather conditions.
- Inform the District Maintenance Superintendent of changing conditions.

Maintenance Personnel (e.g., Snowplow Operators)

- Observe local road and weather conditions and advise Subarea Supervisor as changes occur.
- Assist in trunk highway closure and re-opening, as assigned.

District Communications and Public Engagement Staff

- Ensure that the public and local news media have been notified of the trunk highway closure and subsequent re-opening.
- Notify Minnesota Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) of closures on the National Highway System (NHS) anticipated to last more than eight hours. (Note: for wintertime, weather-related closures, only interstate closures need to be reported.)
- Provide information about changes in road and travel conditions to Central Office communications for statewide messages.
- Assist with media interviews during snow and ice emergencies.

State Patrol

MnDOT recognizes that it cannot assign responsibilities to the State Patrol, however, the State Patrol partners with MnDOT by performing the following roles:

- Notify MnDOT of conditions that may require the closure of a trunk highway.
- Assist MnDOT by providing a communication link between MnDOT and the county sheriffs in their districts.

Policy Owners (Director, Office of Maintenance and Transportation System Management and Operations Director)

- Review the policy every year to ensure the policy remains up-to-date.
- Ensure supporting documents and training associated with the policy remain current.
- Monitor state, federal, enterprise, agency, or other requirements that apply to the policy or procedures.
- Consult with the Office of Chief Counsel to ensure the policy and procedures remain compliant with all state, federal, enterprise, agency, or other requirements.
- Ensure that necessary approvals by state or federal agencies are obtained before changes to the policy or procedures are implemented.
- Work with the Policy Coordinator to revise the policy and/or confirm its accuracy.
- Communicate policy revisions, reviews, and retirements to stakeholders.

Resources & Related Information

Processes, Procedures, and Instructions

- [Closure of Trunk Highways for Severe Storms or Natural Disasters Guidance](#)

Resources

- [Minnesota Statutes §160.27, subdivision 8](#)
- [Minnesota Statutes §10.65](#)
- [Business Data Catalog \(BDC\)](#)
- MnDOT's [Policy Website](#)

History & Updates

Initial Adoption

Date: 9-7-1983

Comments: Policy #83-2 adopted

First Revision

Date: 2-22-2023

Comments: Complete re-write of policy and renumbered as #OE015

Authorization

Policy Owner:

Electronic Signature: _____
Digitally signed by Jed Falgren
Date: 2023.02.21 08:34:45 -06'00'
Jed Falgren
Director – Office of Maintenance

Electronic Signature: _____
Digitally signed by Brian Kary
Date: 2023.02.21 09:19:05 -06'00'
Brian Kary
Transportation System Management and Operations Director

Governance Committee has reviewed this policy and recommends approval:

Electronic Signature: _____
Digitally signed by Marni Karnowski
Date: 2023.02.21 09:36:33 -06'00'
Marni Karnowski
Governance Committee Chair

Responsible Senior Officer:

Electronic Signature: _____
Digitally signed by Jean Wallace
Date: 2023.02.22 16:53:00 -06'00'
Jean Wallace
Deputy Commissioner – Chief Engineer

Policy Review

This policy has been reviewed by the Policy Owner, the policy content is current, and no significant modifications are needed. Minor modifications have been noted in the “Comments” section.

First Review

Policy Owner Signature and Date: _____

Comments:

Second Review

Policy Owner Signature and Date: _____

Comments: