



An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála  
agus Rialtais Áitiúil

Department of Housing, Planning  
and Local Government

## **Statement from the National Emergency Coordination Group (NECG)**

**Sunday, 4 March 2018**

### **Introduction**

The NECG met this morning to review the evolving severe weather situation and was joined by Ministers Eoghan Murphy T.D., John Paul Phelan T.D., Paul Kehoe T.D. and Boxer Moran T.D., with Ministers Damien English T.D. and Minister Shane Ross T.D. on conference call.

### **Current Situation**

Nature demonstrated its raw power in many areas of the country during this week. This is something we haven't seen for thirty five years and very challenging conditions exist in many areas.

While a thaw is happening, deep snow has accumulated in many areas with communities in Wexford, West Wicklow and North Kildare in particular being badly affected but many other areas are also severely impacted. Some communities have been isolated by huge drifts blocking roads since the heavy snow began on Thursday night.

All agencies have been working flat out to restore services across the country. Local authorities have been calling in contractors to assist them with the priority work. Local authorities are also asking communities to assist where they can in clearing roads.

In parts of the east of the country which were worst affected, the Principal Response Agencies are still in full crisis management mode in the Local Co-ordination Centres. This is a collaborative effort between local authorities, An Garda Síochána and the HSE, with Civil Defence and the Defence Forces providing invaluable support, and this will continue as necessary.

The Local Coordination Centres are taking the calls from the public and are prioritising:

- Emergency operations
- Utilities support
- Mobilising additional contractor capacity
- National and regional roads and special requirements like food distribution and public transport nodes
- Isolated villages

The NECG has asked for understanding and patience from the public. Please be assured that everything possible is being done to resolve problems being experienced.

### **Tomorrow**

While the NECG continues to coordinate efforts to get the country back to normality, tomorrow will not be a normal Monday in many areas.

Schools in areas where it is feasible have been checking their premises today and linking with school bus operators in order to make decision about opening tomorrow. This is being done on a case by case basis and decisions will be communicated to parents locally.

From reports received, it is not likely that schools will open tomorrow in the areas worst affected, such as Wexford, West Wicklow and North Kildare.

The normal Monday commute will be very different also. Where possible, we are asking people to use public transport.

Employers and employees are asked to consider staggering opening and start times to reduce peak volumes of commuter traffic as well as options for working from home. Clearly some employees will not be able to travel and we ask for flexibility and understanding.

### **Public Buildings**

Government Departments, Offices and Agencies will be open on Monday. Some decisions to open will appropriately be made locally in the badly affected areas.

### **Transport**

While the motorway network is open, significant lane restrictions remain in place and it is necessary for motorists to travel at appropriate speeds.

The potential volumes of traffic on the M7 poses significant challenges in current circumstances, with heavy snowfalls in the Kildare area having been experienced. This has resulted in a restriction to one lane on the M7 between Junction 8 and Junction 10 at Naas. Should an incident take place on this stretch of road during tomorrow morning's commute, there is a risk of lack of access for emergency services. Establishing alternative route availability in such cases would cause particular difficulties and significant delays.

Work is ongoing to try to expand the number of operational lanes from one lane to two lanes, but commuters are advised not to attempt to use the M7 at peak times on Sunday evening and Monday morning and to monitor traffic reports thereafter.

Motorists need to exercise caution and drive at speeds appropriate to the conditions.

Motorists, particularly in urban areas, are asked to travel at low speeds and watch for cyclists and pedestrians who may be on the road due to obstruction of footpaths. Cyclists and pedestrians are reminded to use high-visibility clothing.

Public transport is resuming, with most services getting back to scheduled operations today, although services in the south-east will continue to be restricted. Intending service users should check in with operators before starting journeys.

### **Retail Outlets**

Supplies are in place in many locations. Shops are in the process of re-stocking but it may be a number of days before supplies return to normal levels.

### **Utilities**

ESB continues to work to restore power today to its 6,000 customers in the Wexford area, with assistance from local authorities in accessing faults.

Irish Water is reporting about 18,000 people are without water, of which over 11,000 are in Wexford. Currently, 66,000 people have restricted supply. Our main concern today is the

increase in demand across the country which is putting severe pressure on our water treatment plants.

The Greater Dublin Area saw an increase in demand of over 10% from Friday to Sunday. Despite having plants working at peak output, storage was depleted by 30 million litres. Similar pressures are occurring elsewhere and if not reversed will lead to pressure reductions and the possibility of night-time restrictions.

Householders are urged to conserve water. In addition, the public is asked to visit premises which have been unattended over recent days to check for running taps and burst pipes.

### **Health**

In relation to the health service, over 1,000 ambulance calls have been answered in the last 24 hours, and they have got to everyone. However, ambulance services will remain under pressure over the next 24 hours, particularly in the south east.

General health services, including all outpatients and day surgeries, are expected to resume on Monday, apart from some areas still experiencing travel difficulties. All non-elective surgeries are cancelled on Monday.

Demands on Emergency Departments have increased significantly over the last number of days due to an increase in injuries arising from slips, trips and falls.

### **Defence Forces**

The Defence Forces received 319 requests and have provided 1,200 personnel and 389 vehicles to support both local authorities and HSE operations.

The Defence Forces are utilising their 6x6 capability to transport patients that the HSE could not access due to local weather conditions in the Kildare region.

### **Weather Outlook**

- Met Éireann is forecasting mostly cloudy today with scattered outbreaks of rain. The rain will be persistent at times - especially across the east and south coasts, and may be of sleet over high ground. Moderate northeast winds.
- Temperatures will recover, ranging from +3 to +6 degrees, which will continue the process of melting snow and ice.
- The weather outlook is for a cloudy night tonight with recurring outbreaks of rain. Good dry spells too. Slight ground frost forming in places. Minimum temperatures zero to +3 degrees. Light variable winds.
- Tomorrow Monday will be a brighter day with still a lot of cloud, but with sunny spells too. Starting off cold (around zero degrees in the morning), most places generally dry, apart from passing light showers. Highest temperatures +6 to +8 degrees. Light variable winds.

- There will be a gradual overall rise in temperatures going through the week with remaining deposits of snow continuing to melt. Westerly winds returning during the week, which will keep temperatures up but frost likely at night through clear skies.

Possible fog forming over the midlands, especially over lying snow, which could cause some difficult circumstances tomorrow and in the early days of next week.

### The Flooding Issue

Melting snow may result in localised surface water ponding, where drains and gulleys are blocked and people are advised to watch for accumulations of melt water which could lead to flooding.

High tides have passed on the south coast without incident, but high tides on the east coast this afternoon are being monitored.

OPW continues to closely monitor sea level forecasts and river levels nationally.

The OPW High Tide Advisory notice remains in place until Monday due to the period of very high astronomical tides and Local Authorities are continuing to monitor sea level conditions in their respective coastal areas over this period, especially on the East and South Coasts.

Whilst river levels nationally have been falling over the past circa 2 weeks, some of the smaller, steeper or mountainous catchments in the North East and East of the country have started to rise in the past 24 hours.

Local authorities are monitoring and the public are advised to closely monitor river levels at over the coming days and during the period of snow melt, especially in smaller, steep and mountainous catchments that have experienced heavy snowfalls.

The public and farmers are advised to stay away from water courses over the coming days to minimise risks of flood waters, with safety remaining the primary concern.