

# **Seattle Office of Emergency Management**

## **After Action Report for Snow Event 11-0536**

### **Event Dates: February 23 and 24, 2011**

#### **Event Overview**

On Monday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011 the Seattle Office of Emergency Management (OEM) participated in a Webinar conference call hosted by the National Weather Service to discuss the winter storm predicted for Wednesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>. After the Webinar, a summary of the forecast discussion was sent by OEM to City departments and regional partners that stated in part:

- Potential for heavy lowland snow on Wednesday afternoon in the Seattle\King County area.
- During the day on Wednesday snow will begin in Snohomish County and areas northward. This weather system will move southward with snow falling throughout Seattle by 3 PM. Expect temperatures to drop from mid 30s to low 30s as the snow moves into our area. Temperatures will continue to fall into the upper 20s overnight and into Thursday morning. At this time, the snowfall is expected to impact the Wednesday afternoon commute.
- Snow accumulation up to 2-5 inches of snow in King County\Seattle area and to the south
- Snow will continue into Wednesday night and Thursday morning. Snowfall in the King County\Seattle area will end sometime Thursday morning. Unknown at this time if snow will still be falling during the Thursday morning commute.

At 9 AM on Tuesday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Seattle OEM hosted a planning meeting for the expected winter storm with representatives from the Strategic Workgroup (in person or by conference call).

The objectives for the response were defined as:

- Maintain overall road condition awareness and impacts to critical services
- Maintain mobility as defined by SDOT's current strategy
- Ensure health systems and services are closely monitored for interruptions and coordination of impacts
- Address human services and systems impacts and coordinate assistance and response strategy
- Stay in communication with community and higher levels of government
- Maintain status and inventory of key snow response resources – generators, fuel, vehicle snow supplies, etc.

An action plan was developed which included activation of the City Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at 1 PM on Wednesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> and 5 AM on Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup>. Operations centers for the police and transportation departments were also scheduled to activate during the event.

The weather forecast continued to change throughout the evening and into the next day. Seattle OEM and partners participated in a second National Weather Service Webinar at 11 AM on Wednesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Seattle OEM summary of the forecast stated that stated in part:

- The weather system is evolving as anticipated; however, it looks as though the rapid drop in temperatures will occur later in the evening. The Central Puget Sound snow fall today is expected to be 1 – 2 inches, causing slushy and wet roadways. Temperatures are expected to drop rapidly, possibly as late as 7 PM causing freezing roadways. The possibility of snow tonight remains at 2 – 6 inches of accumulation.”

The City EOC was activated at 4 PM on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. The activation time was adjusted from the original time of 1 PM to accommodate the expected later arrival of the storm. The following departments were represented in the Emergency Operations Center:

- Mayor's Office
- Office of Emergency Management
- Auxiliary Communications Service
- Police

- Fire
- Transportation
- Human Services
- Parks
- Seattle Public Utilities
- Seattle City Light
- Finance and Administrative Services

During the afternoon and evening reports indicated snow was falling and accumulating in Snohomish County. Other than scattered reports of snowfall no significant amount of snow fell in Seattle. The updated forecast predicted snowfall overnight on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and into the following morning with accumulation of 1 to 6 inches possible in the Seattle area. Department of Transportation deployed extra snowplow\spreaders in the north end of Seattle overnight.

The Seattle EOC closed at 7 PM.

The EOC activated again at 5 AM on February 24th. No significant snow fell during the commute and the Center closed at 8 AM.

### **Lessons Learned**

There were no significant operational issues identified for improvement during this event. During the times when the EOC was activated Snapshot reports were issued every hour to partners.

Three new operational procedures were successfully implemented during this activation. These will be added to EOC standard operating procedures:

- To ensure press releases and Snapshot reports provided the same information; the EOC Planning Section Chief, the EOC Director and the Joint Information Center Supervisor reviewed each draft Snapshot Report and press release together.
- Department representatives added the word "confirmed" to updates entered into WebEOC which they had verified as accurate; this saved Joint Information Center staff time they normally would have expended attempting to verify information.
- Where practical, updates were entered into WebEOC as a short summary with more detail provided in an attached document. This made the Incident Details list in WebEOC shorter in length and easier to read.