

Decision Making During Periods of Inclement Weather

Outlined below is a summary of the process and criteria used for making decisions as to whether the University will be open or closed during periods of inclement weather. (Employees of the VCU Health System should go to VCUHS Inclement Weather web page to obtain information regarding the decision-making process for the hospitals and physician practice plan.)

The safety of our faculty, staff, and students is the principal consideration when decisions are made to open or close during periods of inclement weather. Moreover, we are aware that not everyone will concur with each decision. Our students and employees are located over a very large geographical area, and while there may be significant snow or ice in one area, other areas may not be affected. In the end, the decision is based on whether a substantial majority of our 40,000 students and employees can safely get to class and work.

The following senior University officials assist the President in making a decision to open or close the University during periods of inclement weather:

- President's Chief of Staff and Vice President for University Outreach
- Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration
- Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
- CEO of the VCU Health System and VCU Vice President for Health Sciences
- Associate Vice President Facilities Management

For a typical event, either a meeting or conference call is conducted among these officials. If inclement weather conditions evolve or occur late in the evening or overnight, the above officials participate in a 5:00 a.m. conference call. These issues are considered:

- Current and forecasted weather;
- Actual weather conditions in the area of the conference call participants – includes City of Richmond and the counties of Chesterfield, Henrico, Goochland and Hanover;
- VCU Police report of road conditions in the metro area;
- VDOT report of road conditions for the greater metro area;
- On-campus conditions as revealed by grounds personnel who arrive around 1:00 a.m. to begin clearing priority sidewalks and parking lots;
- Status of snow removal by the contractor who clears the upper level of the decks and assists with surface parking lots; and
- Closings in the area, including other universities and local and state government offices.

Based on a discussion of these items, the President makes the decision on whether to open or close. Media outlets are immediately notified. At the same time, the VCU Alert Website, and the Inclement Weather phone message are updated. The goal is to make these public notifications within minutes of the decision -- early enough so that no one leaves home needlessly.

Even when the University opens during inclement weather conditions, we recognize that personal safety may continue to be a concern for faculty, staff, and students. In these difficult times, we encourage managers to consider the needs of their faculty and staff and to extend leave flexibility in extenuating circumstances. Likewise, we encourage faculty to be mindful of the need to provide students who miss classes with the opportunity to complete assignments and to make up work missed.