



**UNIVERSITY POLICY P-09.04-5/22**

**TO:** The University of West Florida Community

**FROM:** Dr. Martha D. Saunders, President

**SUBJECT:** Emergency Closure

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** University Police Department

**I. Purpose:**

This policy sets forth the standard University practice regarding the closure of the University campus due to an emergency event. Several factors will influence whether all or part of the campus will be affected. These factors include but are not limited to, the risk of injury or death to people, dangers due to property damage, and disruption of essential utilities.

For purposes of this policy, an “emergency” is defined as the threat of severe weather such as hurricanes, tropical storms, tornados or flooding, environmental hazards that cause large numbers of individuals to become displaced, or a declared emergency by UWF President, local, state, or federal government, whether related to weather or other causes.

**II. Policy:**

During any emergency, the safety of students, faculty, staff, and visitors is paramount. The University of West Florida will disrupt normal operations when an emergency poses a substantive threat (e.g., state or local government, NOAA forecasters, Homeland Security, etc.) to the safety of individuals. Actions taken may include the suspension of classes, the closure of all or specific facilities, and/or the cancellation of scheduled events.

Only the President or designee is authorized to close the University due to emergencies. This decision will be made in consultation with the Provost and Vice Presidents.

**A. Severe Weather**

The University will close and cease all but essential public safety operations on the Pensacola campus as quickly as possible following the issuance of a hurricane warning or an emergency event for the Pensacola area. The University's facilities in Okaloosa and Walton counties will follow the directives of Northwest Florida State College concerning closure. The downtown West Florida Historic Trust facilities will follow the directives issued by its Executive Director. Other UWF downtown locations will follow the directives issued by the Executive Director of the West Florida Historic Trust.

In all instances of severe weather, University faculty, staff, and students should evaluate their circumstances to determine actions appropriate and necessary to ensure their personal safety and the safety of their families.

The use of faculty/staff offices or any education space as shelters before, during, or after a severe weather event is not permitted unless approved by the University. Anyone in need of a place of refuge will be directed to designated public shelters.

## B. Other Considerations for Closing

Other campus closures may be required to accomplish one or more of the following objectives:

1. Protecting life;
2. Supporting health and safety services;
3. Protecting University assets;
4. Maintaining or restoring essential University systems;
5. Assessing and repairing damages; or
6. Restoring general campus operations.

Considerations for closure include, but are not limited to:

1. National Weather Service (NWS) severe weather watches and warnings are issued for the campus locations.
2. An emergency or public health declaration by the county, state, or federal government that includes the city, county, or state where the campus is located.
3. Campus Public Safety, Health, or other officials identify a credible threat that would limit or cause failure in achieving the above objectives, or such an event has occurred or is occurring.
4. The decision and timing of the local school board to close is likely in response to considerations like those herein.
5. The University's closure requirements per Chapter 252, Florida Statutes, may be required by the local emergency management agency.

When an emergency closure is announced, campus facilities and grounds will not be accessible except to those performing emergency work and essential functions and to pre-authorized public safety officials.

## C. Closure Decision-Making and Communication

When an emergency threat or event is identified, the University Threat Assessment Team (TAT) will meet via conference call, virtual meeting, or in-person to assess at a high level if other steps need to occur or if activation of the Emergency Operation Plan is appropriate. The TAT is comprised of the University President, Provost, Vice-President for Finance and Administration, Institutional Communications, Vice-President for Academic Engagement and Student Affairs, Chief of Police, and the Environmental Health and Safety Director.

Decisions concerning closure will be communicated to the campus and the local community via all applicable portals and notification means at the disposal of the University as expeditiously as possible. Those communications will, if possible, include the time when the next update will be issued. Employees and students should continue to monitor local media for updates throughout severe weather threats in case the situation worsens, and another update is necessary. Employees should direct questions regarding their work schedules to their supervisors. The re-opening of campus will be announced by the same process when the objectives referenced above have been appropriately addressed.

When possible, notification of the campus closings or delays or related changes will be made by the following times on the day of the closing:

- Morning cancellation or closing – by 6:00 a.m.
- Afternoon cancellation or closing – by 10:00 a.m.
- Evening cancellation or closing – by 2:00 p.m.

Decisions regarding make-up classes and workdays will be made by the President on a case-by-case basis. The make-up of academic work is under the purview of the individual instructor.

**Approved by:**  \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** 05/31/2022  
Dr. Martha D. Saunders

**Authority:** Fla. BOG Reg. 1.001  
UWF BOT Resolution 2017.5 (Resolution on Presidential Authority for President Saunders)

**History:** Adopted October 2002; amended August 2011; renamed and amended June 2017; amended May, 2022