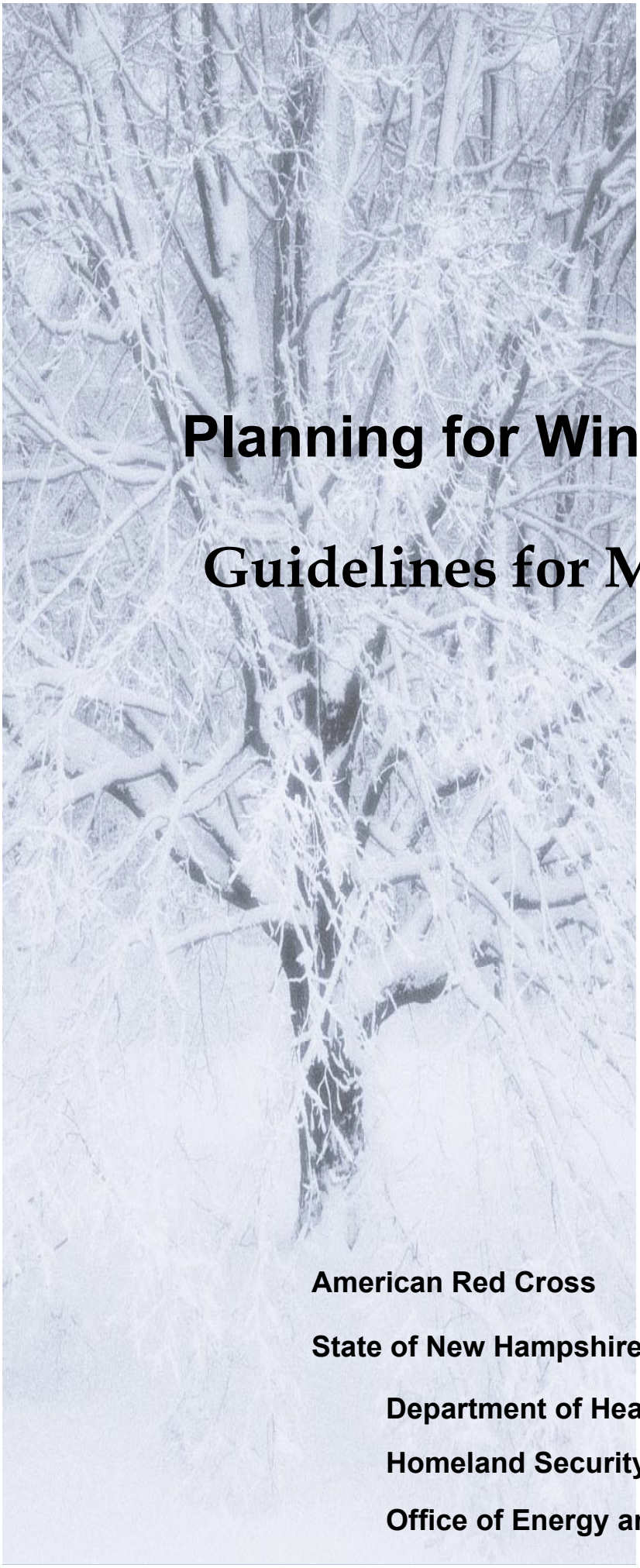

Planning for Winter Sheltering

Guidelines for Municipalities

American Red Cross

State of New Hampshire

Department of Health and Human Services

Homeland Security/Emergency Management

Office of Energy and Planning

Planning for Winter Sheltering
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Helping families stay warm and safe this winter is a priority for everyone in the State of New Hampshire. One way of helping vulnerable citizens during extremely cold weather and/or loss of heat is through the provision of temporary shelters – either warming stations or overnight shelters. Opening a temporary shelter or warming station is a decision made at the local community level. While local governments may be responsible for operating a temporary shelter or warming station, various State Agencies and non-governmental organizations, such as the American Red Cross (ARC) and faith based organizations, can assist to the extent their resources permit.

In the event there is a need to establish shelters, municipalities should plan now for possible sheltering before the worst of the winter weather arrives. Your local ARC Chapter can provide assistance in the planning process and training of volunteers identified by a community to manage and operate a shelter. Proactively, municipalities should assess their existing community sheltering resources as to their availability, location and capacity; identify vulnerable populations in their communities such as elderly, disabled, families with children and people with functional needs; and should reach out to adjoining communities for possible cooperative regional approaches to sheltering.

Before opening a shelter, a municipality should:

- Make every effort to arrange for the local purchase or donation of heating oil or other energy resource for those in need.
- If a temporary or isolated situation occurs, consider whether the municipality can afford to place needy individuals in a nearby motel or hotel.
- Make certain the affected citizens have contacted 2-1-1 and their local Community Action Program (CAP) agency for possible heating assistance.
- Contact community and faith based organizations, such as **Ushare**, to see if they may be able to help or make appropriate referrals.
- Check with other community resources and organizations such as: cordwood banks and **Neighbor Helping Neighbor** for help.
- Refer the individuals to the closest New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS) District Office for possible non-heating assistance, such as Food Stamps or Medicaid.
- Refer elderly to their local Community Action Program (CAP) Agency for the Senior Elderly Assistance Program that can provide a one-time grant of up to $250 to eligible seniors.
- Note that many organizations only operate during regular business hours.

If the community determines that it must establish a temporary shelter because there is no other way to ensure the safety of affected citizens, it should review information on setting up and managing shelters on the ARC and NH DHHS websites. See also the ARC **Guide for Shelter Managers**.

In addition, a municipality should:

- Determine whether a warming station or overnight shelter is needed.
- Identify the shelter location - it must have adequate bathroom facilities, be readily accessible and have generator backup in the event of a power failure.
- Recruit volunteers and others who will operate the shelter.

- Consider any unique transportation needs.
- Consider any special needs of those who will be shelter guests, including language barriers.
- Decide whether any special provision is needed for household pets.
- Identify whether food will be needed and how it will be obtained - local churches or food banks may be able to provide assistance.
- Determine if any security is needed.
- Decide if cots, blankets and other equipment are needed – the local ARC Chapter may be able to help.
- Most importantly, prior to the event, contact the local ARC Chapter for assistance with planning, shelter requirements, training shelter worker volunteers and logistical support.

Remember

Persons in need of assistance with heating their home should call **2-1-1** or go to the **Stay Warm NH** website which will put them in touch with a variety of heating assistance programs, or their local CAP agency. If the need is immediate, people should go to their local welfare office, police or fire station.

It may be more cost efficient for the local government to provide a supply of heating oil or arrange for a local motel/hotel stay rather than to open a shelter.

The State of New Hampshire and the ARC will not open, manage or staff temporary shelters or warming stations for people who are unable to heat their homes due to a lack of heating oil, wood, propane or any other heating source, but will assist in planning, training and securing equipment and other resources if available. The ARC will continue to provide "mass care" to include sheltering in the event of a "disaster" as defined by the ARC to include: ice storms, blizzards, floods, tornados, hurricanes and house fires, etc.

If further assistance is needed, contact the NH DHHS Emergency Services Director (271-4322 or 1-800-852-3345 x 4322) 7-1-1- (NH Relay). NH DHHS will work with Homeland Security/Emergency Management (HSEM), the New Hampshire National Guard, Office of Energy and Planning (OEP), CAP agencies, faith based organizations, the ARC and other organizations to locate possible resources.

Who Can Help

2-1-1: dial 211 or http://www.211nh.org

Stay Warm NH: http://www.staywarmnh.org/

Ushare: http://www.usharenh.org

CAP Agencies: http://snhshome.homestead.com/CAPLinks.html

ARC: https://americanredcross.org/services/disaster

HSEM: http://www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/bem

NH DHHS: http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us

Office of Energy and Planning: http://www.nh.gov/oep