

URI Severe Weather Response Guide

Updated 12/19/2022

An Attachment to the URI Emergency Operations Plan

Introduction

The University of Rhode Island (URI) Severe Weather Response Guide is intended to facilitate a coordinated response to severe weather events (including hurricanes, nor'easters, and winter storms) that impact or have the potential to impact the URI community. This document is used by emergency responders and university leadership as a decision-making and organizational tool. Each department or agency should maintain their own internal plans to carry out the functions described.

The focus of this guide is preparation for and response to severe weather events. Although referenced, recovery and business continuity functions are beyond the scope of this document.

For purposes of this guide, severe weather refers to any dangerous meteorological phenomena with the potential to cause damage, serious social disruption, or loss of human life.

USING THIS GUIDE: *This guide provides rapid information and decision-making criteria for the specific threat referenced. This document is supplemental to the URI Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). Although the guide serves as a general reference, it is primarily designed for use in a step-wise fashion to facilitate rapid initial response to an incident. Shaded blue boxes indicate the beginning and conclusion of key meetings to organize the response.*

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1. Understand the Threat (Read before Initial Assessment Meeting)

A. Hazard/Risk

Severe weather is a threat that becomes a hazard only when it intersects a vulnerable community. Key variables that define a severe weather event include:

- Precipitation (rain, sleet, hail, snow)
- Temperature (extreme cold or heat)
- Winds (direction, velocity)
- Duration of event and geographic extent of impact
- Timing with respect to number of people present on campus
- Extent of notice (advance warning, no warning)

B. Vulnerability

URI's campuses are vulnerable to a number of severe weather events that include hurricanes and nor'easters, winter storms, flooding, extreme wind, and extreme heat.

NOTE: Hurricanes reaching Southern New England typically accelerate as they move up the East Coast. Consequently, there is a wide degree of uncertainty for most storms until 24-48 hours pre-landfall. Storm preparations should be based on the best information available.

2. Understand URI's Response (Read before Initial Assessment Meeting)

A. Internal Impacts

Severe weather may impact the URI community in a number of ways:

- Injury, illness, and/or loss of life within the University community
- Damage to University property and infrastructure
- Interruption of utilities (electricity, water, gas, data)

All of these have the potential to significantly impact University operations (course delivery, research, and support functions).

B. External Impacts

Severe weather events generally impact an area much larger than the university. Consideration must be given to the surrounding region to determine what resources are available to the university and/or what resources the university may be called upon to offer to neighboring communities.

C. URI Responsibilities

The university's responsibilities during a severe weather event may include (in no specific order):

- Maintain order on campus and ensure safety of all individuals; secure campus buildings and control access.
- Provide shelter to on-campus residents and, if necessary, to off-campus residents who are unable to find shelter elsewhere.
- Locate and assist first responders with evacuation and/or sheltering-in-place of individuals with access and functional needs.
- Ensure that dining halls can provide meals to residents.
- Ensure the continuation of or rapid resumption of activities related to the University's academic mission.
- Continue essential administrative functions.

3. Gather Information, Make Notifications

A. Gather Initial Information

The following information should be gathered by those individuals initially notified of the situation:

- Nature and character of the event (based on considerations listed under *Hazard/Risk*)
- General information as to what else is taking place concurrently on campus and/or in the surrounding community

B. Conduct Immediate Notifications

No-Notice Events

Emergency notification for weather events without advance notice (e.g., tornado) will be made in accordance with the university's current Administrative Call List. Essential notifications include:

- URI Public Safety Dispatch
- Emergency Management Director (Assistant Director of Public Safety)
- Chief of Police (Director of Public Safety)
- URI Police Shift Supervisor
- Director of Facilities Operations
- Dean of Students
- Director of Housing and Residential Life

Advance Notice Events

Notification for weather events for which there is advanced warning is generally less urgent and is for the purposes of convening members of an Initial Assessment Team as described below.

Executive Policy Group

Depending on the scope of the incident, the Executive Policy Group may be convened as defined in the URI Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

C. Review Essential Functions

In advance of an Initial Assessment Meeting, evaluate the impacts of the severe weather event based on the following. (Be prepared to discuss these impacts during the Initial Assessment Meeting.)

Continuity of Operations (COOP)

Consider how URI's emergency response and continuity of operations (COOP) essential functions will be sustained during a severe weather event. These are outlined in Appendix 1 and include:

- Mass care
- Healthcare
- Energy and Utilities
- Public safety and security

Business Continuity

Consider how URI's business continuity essential functions will be sustained during a severe weather event. Though beyond the scope of this guide, business continuity essential functions include: Academics, Research, Business and financial services, Reputation and admissions, and Special events.

4. Make Key Decisions (Initial Assessment Meeting)

A. Convene Assessment Team

The Emergency Management Director will convene an Initial Assessment Team, typically in the University's Emergency Operations Center or via conference call. This meeting will include the following individuals or their delegates:

- Director of Facilities Operations
- Dean of Students
- Director of Housing and Residential Life
- Director of Public Safety or Police Major
- AVP of Human Resources

Depending on the nature and scale of the incident, the Initial Assessment Team may be expanded to include any of the following:

- Communications and Marketing
- Facilities Operations (and Facilities from the other campuses)
- Fire & Life Safety
- Health Services
- Housing and Residential Life
- Memorial Union
- Dining Services
- Office of Emergency Management
- Police Department
- Provost's Office
- Office of Research Integrity
- Kingston Fire District

These representatives will transition to fill corresponding ICS roles, if activated.

BEGIN INITIAL ASSESSMENT MEETING (Initial Assessment Team, Incident Command) – Review Sections 1-2, above, before the Initial Assessment Meeting. The following questions should shape the first meeting and will dictate the outcome of the response.

NOTE: If the Executive Policy Group has been convened, the Initial Assessment Team will provide the group with recommendations for any high-level policy decisions needed. If the Executive Policy Group has not been formally convened, the Initial Assessment Team will refer

any high-level policy decisions to the most appropriate area of executive leadership as described in the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

B. Address Major Issues/Policy Questions

General policy questions include:

- Will classes or other activities be cancelled or certain facilities closed?
- Will evacuation of any campuses or locations on campuses be required?
- Will there be a need to open an emergency shelter and/or warming/cooling center?
- How will normal standards for police, fire, and EMS response be altered during the storm and/or its aftermath?
- Will a curfew or other restrictions be established in order to limit safety hazards and maintain order during nighttime hours?
- Will URI set up a parents' information hotline and/or post information on the URI web site?
- Will URI request additional resources from local, state, and/or federal agencies?
- What is the appropriate level of Incident Command System (ICS) and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation, and to what extent should sections develop staffing plans?
- How will URI's leadership evaluate response operations and monitor progress?

NOTE: During the height of the storm, emergency response by police, fire, and EMS may have to be suspended or otherwise limited to immediate life-saving operations only.

C. Direct Initial Response Objectives

Goals for the university's initial response should reflect the following Priority 1 safety and security support functions as defined in URI's *Continuity of Operations/Business Continuity Plan [DRAFT]*:

- Notify the URI community and relevant stakeholders using the University's Emergency Notification System (ENS) and other means as appropriate.
- Provide support to the campus community with respect to security, shelter, food, and other necessities; Deploy resources as necessary for this purpose.
- Deploy law enforcement and security assets as necessary to maintain order and protect property.
- Care for the sick or injured if needed and ensure uninterrupted availability of emergency medical services (EMS).
- Provide physical health and mental health services to those affected by the incident.
- Maintain environmental health and safety standards, including sanitation considerations, campus wide for the protection of the entire URI community.
- Coordinate with Disability Services and the Dean of Students' office to assist members of the campus community with access and functional needs, as necessary.

Suggested Tactical Objectives

Depending on circumstances, tactical objectives for the initial operational period may include:

- Develop an initial accurate, consistent, and culturally competent public message for the president's office within a half-hour of notification.

- Ensure the safety and security of all university facilities and community members.
- Undertake measures to mitigate potential adverse impacts on ongoing experiments and research.

Consider any other operations that need to be prioritized within the initial hours of the incident. Once finalized, the initial operational period objectives should be incorporated into the first Incident Action Plan (IAP).

D. Address Public Messaging Considerations

IMPORTANT: In the event of any condition presenting an immediate life threat and/or requiring immediate protective actions, the Office of Emergency Management may activate the university's emergency notification system without further consultation (e.g., tornado touchdown).

- What public messages and response strategies are the most critical to disseminate to the URI community, the general public, public safety personnel, and other critical partners during a campus disturbance? Topics may include:
 - Nature and timing of the anticipated severe weather event
 - Changes to normal operations (including classes) at URI campuses
 - Emergency protective actions (if appropriate)
- What will be the most effective means of message distribution to various populations?
- What information will be conveyed to parents and/or other family members of students?
- How aggressive should messaging be to ensure action without causing undue alarm?
- Anticipate the need to coordinate messaging with:
 - Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA)
 - Rhode Island Council on Post-Secondary Education
 - Local jurisdiction(s)
- Consider the need to provide timely communication with the community; Speed review cycles to ensure that messaging is prompt and useful.

E. Establish Incident “Battle Rhythm”

The EOC Manager will define a timeline for storm preparations and the “battle rhythm” for meetings and briefings. Appendix 2 contains a time-based list of preparatory actions. This timeline may need to be truncated depending on the amount of notice for the weather event – if any.

CONCLUDE INITIAL ASSESSMENT MEETING – The Planning Section Chief will include the approved objectives in the Incident Action Plan (IAP) for the first operational period. Next, prepare for the Operational Briefing to inform ICS staff of the objectives and actions.

5. Activate the Incident Command System

A. Mobilize ICS Response Structure

The EOC Manager will determine the ICS structure using Lead Departments as described in URI's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

The Emergency Management Director will typically serve as the initial EOC Manager. Should a significant localized incident occur on campus (e.g., a structural collapse) an Incident Command Post (ICP) may be established there as an "incident within an incident." In such cases the EOC will serve in a supporting role for that localized incident.

B. Assign Immediate ICS Tasks

BEGIN OPERATIONAL BRIEFING – Assign tasks to support response objectives. Request progress at Command & General Staff Meeting(s).

During the operational briefing, tasks should be assigned as needed to support established response objectives. Additional details about these and other tasks are provided in Appendix 2. Immediate ICS tasks may include the following:

| ICS Response Task | Responsible ICS Role | Lead Individuals/ Department(s) |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Scope of Response: Determine the scope of URI's response to the incident including EOC activation level and ICS staffing. | Incident Commander | Public Safety |
| Public Messaging: Develop an initial accurate, consistent, and culturally competent public message for the President's office within a half-hour of notification. | Public Information Officer | Communications |
| Faculty/Staff: Notify and update URI personnel about the incident, department responses, and associated responsibilities. | Liaison Officer | Human Resources; Communications |
| Student Affairs: Determine how students will be supported during the situation, both those involved and those affected but uninvolved | Mass Care | Student Affairs |
| Academic Affairs: Determine how class schedules and related activities will be affected by the incident? | Academics, Research, and Special Programs | Provost's Office |
| Safety: Evaluate safety considerations for all response personnel and the URI community at large; Ensure appropriate personal protective equipment is utilized. | Safety Officer | Public Safety |
| Security: Identify and evaluate any security vulnerabilities and safety threats; Maintain order, secure impacted facilities, establish regular patrols to prevent looting and vandalism. | Public Safety & Security | URI Police |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Tactical Communications: Evaluate status of key communications infrastructure (including network, telephone, and land-mobile radio); Establish alternate modes of communication critical to public safety and incident response. | Communications (ITS/Infrastructure) | Information Technology |
| | Emergency Management | Office of Emergency Management |
| Sheltering/Mass Care: Evaluate status of residence halls; Activate plans for emergency shelter(s) if needed. Evaluate ability of dining halls to prepare/serve meals; Activate contingency plans if needed. | Mass Care | Housing and Residential Life; Greek Life; Dining Services |
| Research: Identify ongoing research affected by disturbance; Evaluate impacts; Ensure safety of all laboratories and other research facilities. | Academics, Research, and Special Programs | Division of Research and Economic Development |
| Utilities: Evaluate status of campus power grid; Initiate repairs if possible. Evaluate status of heating plant(s), potable water, and other utilities. | Public Works and Engineering | Facilities Operations (Utilities Office) |
| | Energy and Utilities | |

CONCLUDE OPERATIONAL BRIEFING – Each operational group should next hold a Tactics Meeting to determine how they will accomplish assigned objectives and identify necessary resources.

6. Request Support from Local, State, and Federal Agencies

A. Resource/Support Requests

- All resource requests should be processed through the URI Emergency Operations Center (EOC) as described in the *URI Emergency Operations Plan*
- Resources may be obtained from outside vendors or requested via mutual aid or the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC).
- Logistics support (including food, lighting, shelter, etc.)
- Search and rescue support
- Law enforcement support
- Emergency evacuation and shelter support
- Requests for resources do not guarantee availability or prioritization

7. Debrief and Transition with Relief Shift

BEGIN TRANSITION MEETING – The outgoing Incident Command, incoming Incident or Unified Command, and Executive Policy Group (EPG) and/or Initial Assessment Team (IAT) will supply

updates on major decisions and response operations. The EPG and/or IAT should meet to review/update priorities in advance of the transition meeting.

Sample agenda items for the transition meeting include:

- Updates on incident status and response
- Updates on major decisions and policies made during the operational period
- Executive Policy Group priorities for the next operational period (if changed)
- Review response objectives (*refer to Incident Action Plan [IAP]*) and end goal(s) for the next operational period
- Discuss possible future operations (to be conducted in subsequent operational periods)

CONCLUDE TRANSITION MEETING – Provide updated information to Planning Section for inclusion in the IAP for the next operational period.

8. Review Tactical Information

A. Review Initial Issues/Questions

- Assess the current status of the disturbance and determine if the university's response still matched to the nature and scale of the incident.
- Review Executive Policy Group decisions and determine if any changes need to be incorporated into the next operational period.
- Ensure all Essential Functions are being addressed; determine whether or not adequate measures are being taken to protect life and property, and to prevent disruption of the university's academic mission?

B. Assess Available Capabilities & Needs

- Identify any resource gaps and begin efforts to address them before they become critical.

9. Review Supporting Documents

A. Coordinating Centers

URI Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

URI Virtual Emergency Operations Center (vEOC)

State of RI Emergency Operations Center (SEOC)

B. Key Terms

Continuity of Operations. Ability of an organization to sustain its essential functions during a full spectrum of emergencies

Power Outage. A short- or long-term loss of electric power to an area (also called a power cut, a power blackout, or a power failure).

Severe Weather. Any dangerous meteorological phenomena with the potential to cause damage, serious social disruption, or loss of human life

Warming Center. A short-term emergency shelter that operates when temperatures or a combination of precipitation, wind chill, wind and temperature become dangerously inclement

C. References

University of Rhode Island, *Animal Care and Use Program Emergency Plan*

University of Rhode Island, *Emergency Operations Plan [DRAFT]* (October, 2014)

University of Rhode Island, *Continuity of Operations Plan/Business Continuity Plan [DRAFT]* (2012)

University of Rhode Island, *Power Outage Threat Response Guide* (March, 2015)

Appendix 1: Essential Functions

The following severe weather-related essential functions should be incorporated as objectives in the Incident Action Plan (IAP) based on the situation at hand.

Transportation

Department vehicles (needed for storm response)

- ☐ Fuel vehicles before storm, pre-assign to personnel, and make sure keys are accessible [All applicable departments]
- ☐ Confirm staffing of Automotive Shop for emergency repairs during and after storm [Automotive Shop]

Evacuation and mass transit

- ☐ Notify contract shuttle service (currently FirstTransit) when shuttle service is to be suspended [Transportation & Parking]
- ☐ Arrange for contract shuttle service (currently FirstTransit) and/or URI Ram Vans if needed for evacuation or other transportation purposes [Transportation & Parking]

Communications (ITS/Infrastructure)

Availability of communications infrastructure is critical to both emergency response and business continuity for the University. Community members require web access to view updates and receive emergency instructions; Communications & Marketing requires web access to post those updates; the Emergency Operations Center depends on web access to request resources and coordinate information with the RI Emergency Management Agency; and both Police and EMS need internet access for their incident reporting and documentation systems.

Campus Network

- Ensure continued availability of both wired and wireless networks throughout the event.

NOTE: Some network switches do not have generator backup and will shut down during a prolonged power outage when their battery backups fail.

Landline Telephone

- Ensure continued function of landline telephones throughout the event.

NOTE: Landline telephones are VoIP based other than Public Safety emergency lines (Dispatch 4-2121 line and “blue light” phones). If sections of the campus network fail (see above), landline telephones will not work.

Data Center

- Ensure continued function of the data center throughout the event, monitor power situation and prioritize restoration in the event of failure.

NOTE: The campus Data Center is located at Tyler Hall and provided with redundant grid power and a diesel generator backup. Mission-critical applications are housed in the Data Center (including PeopleSoft). Data for these applications is backed up at the DoIT Data Center in Warwick, but there are no backups for the application servers themselves.

PREP TASKS

- ☐ Schedule essential ITS staff to remain on campus throughout the event and make arrangements for additional on-call staff to provide remote support if possible. [ITS]
- ☐ Confirm current backups of application data prior to storm landfall. [ITS]

Public Works and Engineering

Roadways and sidewalks

- Maintain open roadways and sidewalks with priority for emergency access routes, residence halls and shelters, and animal care facilities. [Facilities Operations, Housing & Residential Life, other auxiliaries]

Cleanup and repair

- Perform temporary/emergency repairs to damaged facilities based on priorities determined by the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). [Facilities Operations]

PREP TASKS

- ☐ Schedule sufficient Facilities personnel to remain on campus for the duration of the event, including SMTs, Lands & Grounds staff, etc. [Facilities Operations]
- ☐ Confirm that roadway gates are either locked in the open position or removed altogether if extremely high winds are anticipated. [Transportation & Parking]
- ☐ Confirm a sufficient stockpile of lumber, plywood, tarps, and other materials needed to perform post-storm repairs. [Facilities Operations]

Emergency Management

Response Coordination

- ☐ Establish Incident Command System using the EOC Manager model to coordinate all response operations following the University's Emergency Operations Plan; Include representatives from departments with key storm-related functions. NOTE: Depending on circumstances, the EOC may be run virtually.

Public Information and Messaging

Alert and Warning. For situations requiring immediate action/emergency protective actions, emergency notification systems will be activated by Emergency Management or Communications & Marketing staff.

Public Messaging and Information. All messaging through the designated Public Information Officer (PIO) and approved by the EOC Manager. Normal message approval processes curtailed or suspended following the Emergency Public Information & Warning Plan.

EOC and DISPATCH RELOCATION: The EOC and Public Safety Dispatch Center cannot remain at 44 Lower College Road for severe weather events involving sustained winds greater than 73mph. Give early consideration to relocating these facilities well in advance of storm conditions.

Incident Documentation

All incident documentation, including Incident Action Plans, sign-in sheets, and individual ICS-214 forms, will be collected by the Office of Emergency Management at the end of the event. This may be done through the Virtual EOC for those not physically present in the EOC.

Mass Care (Shelter and Meals)

Residence Halls

Housing & Residential Life will follow their standard policy of sheltering-in-place for residence halls. Should it become necessary, the primary evacuation option is to use common areas of other residence halls. Evacuation is a last resort.

Greek Housing

Greek houses will follow their standard policy of sheltering-in-place for residence halls. Should relocation be necessary, the first option will be other Greek houses willing to offer space. The alternative will be the Memorial Union.

On-Campus Sheltering

URI has limited on-campus sheltering options. Supplies are available for up to 150 people to be sheltered in the Memorial Union ballroom or Keaney Gymnasium using the FEMA shelter cache located on campus (managed by the URI Office of Emergency Management). Shelter operations will require staffing support from HRL and/or Greek Life.

Off-Campus Sheltering

Narragansett has no designated shelter; Residents are directed to South Kingstown High School which has limited capacity and serves South Kingstown, North Kingstown, and Narragansett. URI should expect to shelter some off-campus students if portions of Narragansett are to be evacuated.

Dining Services

Dining services should be prepared (food, staffing, and supplies) to feed the entire on-campus population for at least three (3) days post-landfall. This includes on-campus residents, essential personnel, and any individuals sheltered in the Memorial Union.

Logistics and Resource Management

Staffing and Human Resources

Essential staff should be designated and notified of their duties by their supervisors following university personnel policies and applicable collective bargaining agreements. Individual departments are responsible for billeting staff overnight as needed.

Resource Requests and Staging

All requests for state and federal resources, and resources under the National Intercollegiate Mutual Aid Agreement (NIMAA) will be handled by the Office of Emergency Management through the Virtual EOC.

Communications (Tactical)

Primary radio communications for public safety/first responders will be the statewide RISON 800MHz radio system. Backup communications will be the university's RamCall UHF radio system covering the Kingston Campus (Narragansett Campus coverage to be added shortly.)

Primary radio communications for university leadership and department heads will be the university's RamCall UHF radio system covering the Kingston Campus (Narragansett Campus coverage to be added shortly.)

Responder food and shelter

Billeting at Memorial Union:

- Police and security personnel
- Alarm Services personnel
- Emergency Management personnel

Billeting at Facilities Operations:

- Lands & Grounds personnel
- Automotive personnel
- Other Facilities personnel as needed

Meals at Ram's Den for all billeted staff

Healthcare

Emergency Medical Services

On Kingston Campus, URI EMS is primary emergency medical response and remains staffed throughout the severe weather event. Other campuses rely on their local fire departments for EMS response.

Health Services

Health Services will close during significant storm conditions and reopen as soon as possible thereafter.

Energy and Utilities

Public Grid Power

The Kingston Campus is supplied with public grid power by several feeders. In the event of a power outage, follow the *URI Power Outage Response Guide*. This guide includes a protocol for monitoring the power status of occupied residential buildings during a power outage.

Potable Water

Potable water on the Kingston Campus is drawn from well heads located off Plains Road. In the event the wells are damaged or pumps inoperable, the campus water tank will continue to supply water for up to several days. An interconnect to the South Kingstown water system is also available.

Public Safety and Security

Police/Security

URI Police Department is primary coverage for all campuses. Prior to storm should staff at least two shifts to ensure continuous police and security coverage. Availability of local mutual aid law enforcement is likely to be very limited during and following a major storm.

Fire and Life Safety

URI Fire & Life Safety will be responsible for monitoring safety conditions on the Kingston campus, and on other campuses to the extent possible.

The Kingston Fire District provides fire protection coverage for the Kingston Campus, all other campuses likewise depend on their local fire departments. Because these departments are not part of the University, they operate under their own emergency plans. Coordination with local fire departments during a severe weather event is through the Campus EOC.

Alarm Services

URI Alarm Services will schedule an Electrician or Alarm Technician to remain on campus throughout the weather event in order to perform any emergency repairs to fire alarm systems and/or reset fire alarms.

Animal Services and Veterinary Support

The Office of Research Integrity has procedures in place for continued care of research animals following the *Animal Care and Use Program Emergency Plan*. Support from Facilities Operations will be requested directly or through the EOC if needed.

Appendix 2: Incident Timeline

72-96 Hours Before Landfall

- Initial Assessment Team meets (as described here)
- Briefing for Executive Policy Group (may be combined with IAT meeting)
- Individual departments begin to run their own pre-storm checklists
- Issue community updates and notifications as appropriate

48-72 Hours Before Landfall

- Issue community updates and notifications as appropriate
- Alert recovery contractors

24-48 Hours Before Landfall

- Activate Incident Command System (ICS) and staff key positions
- Set up alternate Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
- Set up alternate Public Safety Dispatch Center
- Preliminary decision whether to close campus, cancel classes, etc.
- Issue community updates and notifications as appropriate
- Prepare vehicles and equipment, ensure adequate fuel supply
- Develop storm-related PO tracking spreadsheet, establish funds for storm-related purchases
- Prepare to issue manual paychecks

0-6 Hours Before Landfall

- EOC fully staffed
- Decide whether to open an emergency shelter facility
- Final decision whether to close campus, cancel classes, etc.
- Prepare research laboratory facilities, shut down equipment and experiments where possible
- Fill water tank to 95% capacity
- Issue community updates and notifications as appropriate

Immediately Post-Storm

- Check for injuries, mitigate life safety hazards
- Survey campus for damage, check status and condition of critical facilities
- Clear roadways and sidewalks, perform emergency repairs to damaged facilities
- Assess damage, notify insurers

Issue community updates and notifications as appropriate