



UNION COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

BEHIND THE STAR

SHERIFF MALCUM J. "JAMIE" PATTON



Understanding Snow Emergency Levels

It's here! Ohio's winter weather has arrived and the challenges of navigating slick roadways have already presented difficulties during travel. The Sheriff of Union County notifies drivers about local road conditions through a system called the Snow Emergency Levels. Ohio County Sheriffs have the responsibility to evaluate road conditions during winter weather events and declare snow emergencies. The Sheriff's Office is concerned not only for the safety of Union County residents, but also those who travel into or out of our county for work or other reasons. Existing Ohio Attorney General Opinions give the Sheriff the authority to declare snow emergencies and temporarily close County, Township, State, and Municipal roadways when this action is reasonably necessary to preserve the public peace.

In order to clarify the definition of snow emergencies, Ohio Sheriffs have adopted guidelines to be followed when closing roadways due to severe winter weather. The guidelines are as follows:

Level 1 – Roadway Advisory

Roadways are hazardous with blowing and drifting snow. Roadways are also icy. Drive very cautiously.

Level 2 – Roadway Warning

Roadways are hazardous with blowing and drifting snow. Only those who feel it is necessary to drive should be out on the roadways. Contact your employer to see if you should report to work.

Level 3 – Roadway Emergency

All Township, County, State and Municipal roadways are **CLOSED** to non-emergency personnel. No one should be out during these conditions, unless it is absolutely necessary to travel. All employees should contact their employer to see if they should report to work. Those traveling on the roadways may subject themselves to arrest.

Deputies travel Union County roadways around the clock and report on road conditions during winter weather events. The Sheriff gathers information from several different sources, including the County Engineer's Office and the Ohio Department of Transportation, before making a decision about snow emergency levels. Once the Sheriff makes a decision to declare a level one, two, or three snow emergency; local media outlets are notified immediately. The Union County Sheriff's Office also sends notification of snow emergencies using the Nixle ® system. County residents can sign up for free Nixle ® alerts using the link on the Sheriff's Office website. On our website (<http://www.co.union.oh.us/Snow-Emergencies/>), you will also find the current snow emergency level in Union County and a map of Ohio that is linked to the Ohio Department of Transportation traffic website (<http://www.ohgo.com/index>) which gives road conditions throughout the State of Ohio.

As a reminder, “Please **do not** call 9-1-1 to ask the Union County Sheriff’s Office dispatchers the current snow level for Union County,” asks Union County Sheriff Jamie Patton. The dispatchers are usually swamped with emergency calls during this type of weather and they need to focus on the emergencies at hand. Dispatchers do not determine when a snow emergency level will be put in place, nor will they know when the levels will be changed or lifted. This is an assessment that is made based upon changing weather and road conditions. Once a decision is made to enact or change a snow emergency level, every effort is made to get the word out to the community as quickly as possible.