

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA  
ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE PROTOCOL

SUBJECT:	ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE PROTOCOL	ITEM NUMBER:	X
OWNER:	XX DEPARTMENT	ADOPTION DATE:	MM/DD/2021
APPROVER(S):	COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS	REVIEW DATE:	MM/DD/20XX
VERSION:	X.X		

**I. Guiding Principles**

It is not safe or healthy for people to live unsheltered. The community must compassionately and constructively provide pathways to shelter and wellness for those living in encampments. This protocol addresses responses to existing homeless encampments and is intended to serve as just one part of the County's larger strategies to address homelessness. An accompanying comprehensive Encampment Resolution Strategy addresses other needs to move toward a successful resolution of encampments: increased access to shelter, leveraging long-term subsidies, new temporary and permanent housing units, robust outreach and engagement, and sustained funding. Other County policies address the needs of specific populations and how those populations are connected to services and housing.

The Phase II Community Action Plan to Address Homelessness is the guide to how the region addresses homelessness. It is guided by a core set of principles that serve as the foundation and create a culture of focusing on solutions to end homelessness. These guiding principles have informed the development of this protocol:

- Respond with urgency
- Provide community with regular and ongoing communication
- Promote cross-sector collaboration and collective support
- Incorporate those with lived experience at all levels of planning, protocol, and implementation
- Embrace best practices and be housing-focused
- Utilize objective data to drive decision making
- Support homeless services providers and value their contribution
- Maintain transparency and accountability at all levels of decision making
- Commit to ongoing performance management and process improvement

The following principles, specific to addressing encampments, have also informed the development of this protocol:

- It is not safe or healthy for people to live unsheltered.
- Adequate safe, accessible, and supportive shelter and housing of all types, including permanent supportive and affordable housing, is the solution to homelessness.
- Low-barrier pathways to permanent housing (including, but not limited to: emergency shelter, bridge housing, and rapid rehousing) are the best solution to addressing encampments.
- People may sleep and live in encampment settings alone or as a collective for many reasons, including a sense of community and safety.
- Community member concerns about encampments within their neighborhoods, including those related to health, sanitation, and safety.
- The County must balance the interests of unsheltered residents with the interests of other community residents.

## **II. Purpose**

The purpose of this homeless encampment protocol is to provide increased clarity and coordination around all aspects of encampment responses for property owned and/or controlled by Santa Barbara County. All interventions will include health and safety measures, and will be based on health and safety risks, available resources, and capacity. The use of this protocol will help ensure:

- Defined roles and responsibilities;
- Coordination and management of limited resources;
- Prioritized approach to address encampments based on defined criteria;
- Consistent application of procedures; and
- Data collection and established metrics to measure the effectiveness of reducing encampments.

## **III. Definitions**

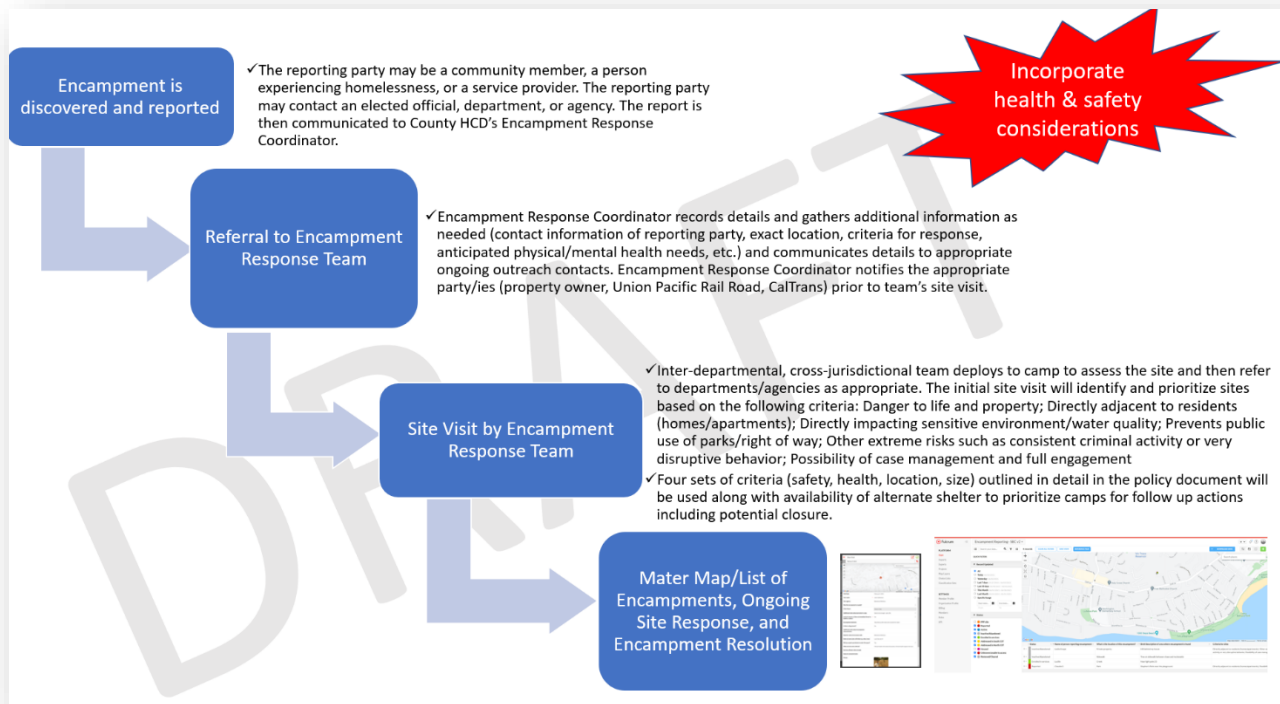
- Emergency shelter: any facility, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary or transitional shelter for persons without housing in general or for specific populations.
- Encampment: Homeless encampments are locations where one or more persons without housing live in an unsheltered area. These encampments can be found on properties owned by private individuals or companies or owned by local, state, and federal governmental agencies.
- Unsheltered homeless persons include people who live in places not meant for human habitation, such as the streets, campgrounds, undeveloped properties, abandoned buildings, vehicles, or parks.
- Sheltered homeless persons are people who are staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens.
- Mainstream resources: publicly funded programs that provide services, housing, and income supports (ex: financial assistance, health care, mental health care, substance use disorder treatment programs) to all eligible persons, not dedicated to homelessness

## **IV. Scope**

This protocol applies countywide to practices when addressing homeless encampments located specifically on property owned or controlled by Santa Barbara County or its organizational units, such as dependent special districts. County assistance to other public agencies to address encampment located on property owned or controlled by those agencies is beyond the scope of this policy. Similarly, encampments located on private property may be referred to the Sheriff's Office but are beyond the scope of this policy.

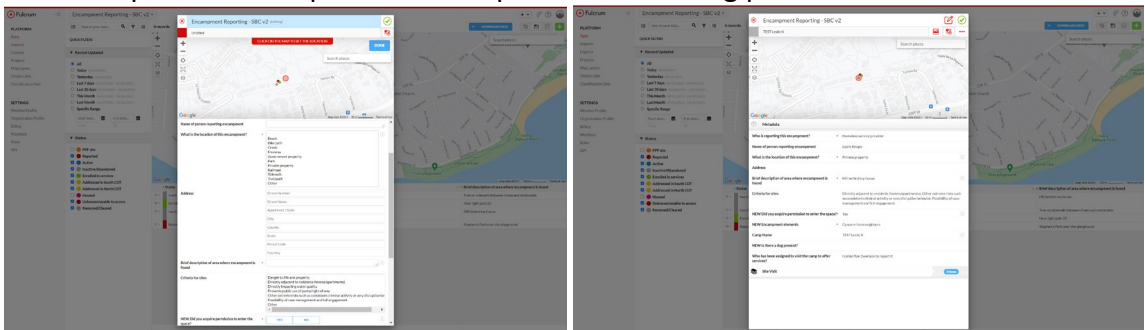
## V. Policy

### Process for Responding to Encampment Reports

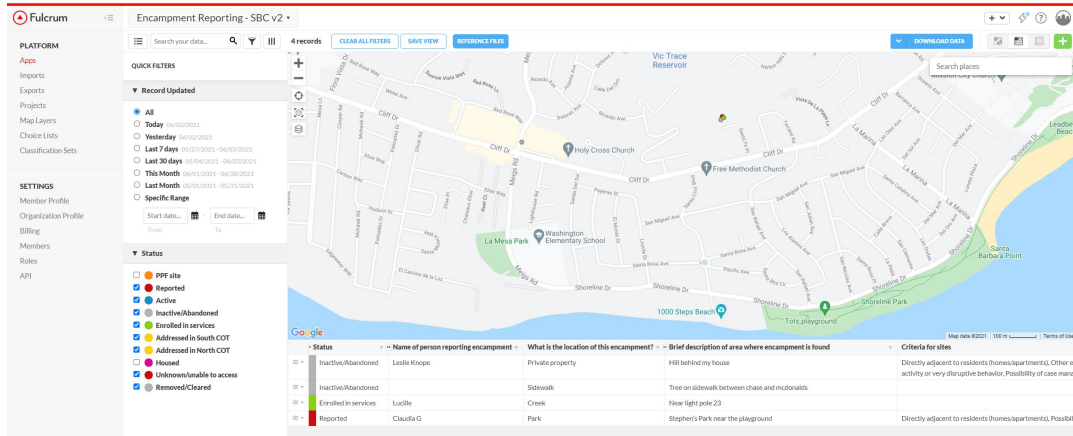


Ending the homelessness crisis will require a coordinated regional vision backed by intense one-on-one engagement and more investment in shelter and housing. However, there are times when a more intensive focus on specific encampments is warranted. This includes scenarios when there are significant health and safety concerns for those at the encampment, or areas being closed off and creating displacement. Until we have more housing, we need to prioritize strategies addressing unsheltered homelessness that are humane, invest limited resources wisely, and address the root causes of the homelessness crisis, rather than perpetuate a broken cycle and move people around at great cost to taxpayers without actually reducing homelessness.

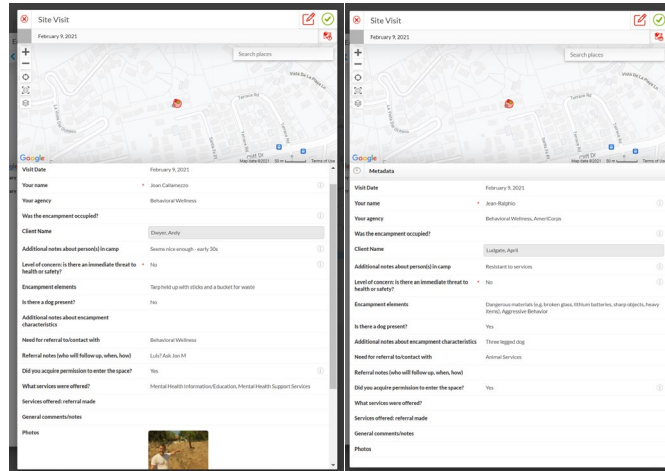
1. **Encampment is discovered and reported:** The reporting party may be a community member, a person experiencing homelessness, or a service provider, and may be communicated via reporting software, phone, or e-mail. The reporting party may contact an elected official, department, or agency. The report is then communicated to the Encampment Response Coordinator.
2. **Referral to Encampment Response Team:** Encampment Response Coordinator records details and gathers additional information as needed (contact information of reporting party, exact location, criteria for response, anticipated physical/mental health needs, etc.) and communicates details to appropriate ongoing outreach contacts. The Encampment Response Coordinator will determine ownership and control of the property. Encampments determined to be located on private property will be referred to the Sheriff's Office. Encampments located on property owned or controlled by other, non-County public agencies will be referred to the appropriate public agency. This protocol does not prevent the County from assisting those non-County public agencies in their response to the encampments, but any such assistance is beyond the scope of this policy. If notice to or authority or permission are necessary prior to a team's site visit, the Encampment Response Coordinator will notify the appropriate party/ies and acquire the necessary authority or permission.
3. **Site Visit by Encampment Response Team:** Inter-departmental, cross-jurisdictional team deploys to camp to assess the site and then refer to departments/agencies as appropriate. The initial site visit will identify and prioritize sites based on the criteria outlined in the following section. The criteria (safety, health, location, size) outlined in detail below in this protocol document will be used along with availability of alternate shelter to prioritize camps for follow up actions including potential closure.



- Master Map/List of Encampments:** Encampment Response Team and ongoing outreach representatives utilize mapping software to accurately report camp and track outreach efforts. The Encampment Response Team will add the site to the mapping software during the initial site visit and assessment. The Encampment Response Coordinator maintains a master list of encampments considered for interventions in the region. The list will include information about the encampments relating to the four criteria below: safety, health, location, size.



- Ongoing Site Response:** Based on encampment response team’s determination of intervention(s) needed, representatives deploy to camp for: continued site monitoring, education on safety measures including vaccination protocol, and case management and shelter opportunities.



- Encampment Resolution:** The Encampment Response Coordinator will work with the Encampment Response Team to monitor/review/update the map/list and recommend which encampments should be prioritized for interventions described in the following sections.
  - Encampment Response Team will consider the availability of shelter or housing opportunities, as well as other necessary resources.
  - Encampment Response Coordinator available resources and outreach/homeless services/case management, temporary health and safety measures, debris pick-up, and cleaning interventions as described below.

- c. Encampment Response Coordinator presents recommendations for closure/removal (including plan and resources available) to the CSD director for approval. The CSD director will consult with County's Chief Executive Office or designee if needed.
- d. As appropriate, the Encampment Response Coordinator will ensure that an after-action report is written to provide data on overall housing placements, service offered, other accomplishments, effective best practices used, and lessons learned.

## VI. **Responsibilities**

### **Roles and responsibilities of Encampment Response Team**

Representatives from various departments will assess the site and refer to departments/agencies as appropriate:

- Encampment Response Coordinator: The Encampment Response Coordinator will track reports of encampments, deploy the response team, coordinate interventions, and plan logistics when closure is recommended. Encampment Response Coordinator deploys field team, monitors mapping app, and coordinates follow-up actions.
- Public Health to determine immediate health response needs
- Fire to assess fire and life safety hazard, provide education about fire risk, and enforce fire codes (may be categorized as preparedness and suppression)
- Law enforcement to confirm site is safe to approach, remain to ensure peace-keeping, address significant criminal activity
- Outreach staff from homeless services agencies contracted with the County to determine case management/housing navigation needs

### **Criteria: Assessing Encampments for Interventions**

The County Community Services Department assists in prioritizing sites and service providers are expected to have regular engagement with persons at those sites in order to mitigate health and safety concerns. The primary goal is to urgently assist the persons living in the encampment access shelter and housing and to ensure protection of the health and safety of the broader community. *The following sets of criteria (safety, location, health, size) will be applied when determining if, and when, any or all of the interventions listed in this protocol are warranted. The list below is not exclusive; additional criteria may be applicable depending on site conditions.*

### **Safety**

- Objective hazards to occupants of an encampment such as proximity to moving vehicles and steep slopes.
- Generating many calls for service to emergency responders, including law enforcement response due to criminal activity, disruptive behavior, or other activities that pose risk to individuals and/or the community at-large.
- Difficulty in extending emergency services to the site due to factors such as location or density of the encampment itself.

- Fire hazards, including potential and actual fire activity.

#### **Location**

- The proximity of the encampment to community resources including but not limited to schools, health centers, senior centers, etc.
- Preventing public access, e.g. blocking a sidewalk.
- Preventing access to public spaces such as parks, preventing public use and incurring (1) loss of revenue from the park location being unavailable for rentals or RV camping and (2) expense of fencing, lights, security, etc.
- Imminent work scheduled at the site for which the encampment will pose an obstruction.
- Damage to environmentally sensitive areas.
- Neighborhood impacts.
- Damage to public infrastructure.

#### **Health**

- Excessive quantities of garbage, trash, or debris.
- Uncontrolled presence of needles, human waste, or other hazardous material.
- Vector hazards (e.g. rats).
- Other active health hazards to occupants or to the surrounding neighborhood.
- Risk to environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. water quality).

#### **Size**

- The size of the encampment (number of residents and/or footprint of camp) is having a disproportionate impact on its surrounding neighborhood.
- The size of the encampment is creating unsafe conditions for the occupants.

#### **Other Considerations**

The criteria used for assessing an encampment must be flexible and may take into consideration criteria outside of those listed above. These circumstances may include:

- Development of a quickly emerging new, large encampment.
- Change in circumstances of an existing encampment related to health, safety, location or size.
- Regional impact, staff capacity, and funding in addressing encampments throughout the county.
- Any circumstances not considered in the criteria (determined by proactive steps such as identifying/mapping/communicating details about such areas), sudden public health emergencies, emergency construction projects in encamped areas, state or other regulatory requirements or environmental challenges like fire and/or flood danger.

Encampment location or other factors may require engagement with departments/agencies beyond the Encampment Response Team and designated vendors. The list below attempts to describe other department roles. Each encampment may have unique challenges that cannot be foreseen. While not an exhaustive list, those noted below may be engaged for additional encampment response as follows:

- Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures-Pesticide enforcement: If encroachment of encampments to nearby agricultural production fields create a potential for exposure to pesticides and chemical applications or obstruct growers from conducting their normal

farming practices, County AGWM inspectors may need to be notified/consulted depending on intervention(s) needed.

- Department of Social Services: On-site enrollment in programs by eligibility workers. Adult Protective Services may need to engage when a person is encountered that may require assistance.
- Fire: Inspection team may provide ongoing fire evaluation and education (may be categorized as preparedness and suppression), note and address challenges due to fire and life safety threats.
- General Services: Clean-up abandoned camps/post notification to vacate site on County-owned public property where maintained by General Services.
- Contracted homeless services agency(ies)/provider(s): Contracted agencies/providers scope of service and budget may include ongoing case management/housing navigation services through rapport-building, enrollment in services, and work with clients to verify eligibility for housing interventions in order to secure appropriate placements and retention. The County's Coordinated Entry System (CES) is a community-wide system to standardize and expedite the process by which people experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of homelessness, access housing and homeless resources. Through CES, people experiencing homelessness will be matched to services and housing based on their preferences and level of need.
- Law enforcement: Officers may focus on providing safety of all on scene and monitor closed sites for regrowth/growth.
- Multi-Disciplinary Team/Co-Response Team (Public Defender, Behavioral Wellness, Public Health): MDT will focus on high utilizers of multiple systems that lack adequate supports or stability to enter low barrier sheltering due to their condition (past history, mental illness, addiction, etc.). Through intensive supportive outreach efforts, linked to needed resources provided by the partners, targeted clients will be provided immediate and emergency assistance, with an emphasis on low barrier sheltering and intensive case management services to ultimately achieve stable housing through on-going support.
- Parks: If encroachment of encampments create potential park hazards, Parks staff may need to be notified/consulted depending on intervention(s) needed.
- Public Health and/or Behavioral Wellness: Physical and Mental health/Behavioral Wellness providers may complete assessments, including a review of substance use activities (a brief health screening by a case manager or other designated staff person, to include referral to services, and identify any potential communicable illness/disease in order to swiftly treat the affected person and take measures to prevent the spread of any illness within the camp). If a resident is ill or concerned about illness they can be provided education on infection prevention and medical care options. Environmental Health Services may also be deployed depending on the need.
- Public Works – Project Clean Water, Flood Control District, Transportation: Issues for Project Clean Water are pollution to creeks/ocean on any property (public or private). Issues for Flood Control District are camps located on District property or within a creek or flood control channel and at risk of flood flows. Issues for Transportation are camps located in the transportation corridors and public road rights of way.



## Interventions to Address Encampments

There are at least five interventions the County may take in regards to an encampment located on property owned or controlled by the County or one of its organization units, such as a special dependent district. Alternatively, the County could take no action other than continue to monitor. The active interventions may include but are not limited to:

### 1. Engage outreach/homeless services/case management:

Consider capacity and availability of alternative transitional/temporary shelter/sites as service providers work with clients to verify eligibility for housing interventions in order to secure appropriate placements and retention.

### 2. Enact temporary health and safety measures

Provide services to address the immediate health and safety needs of persons at an encampment and surrounding neighbors such as barriers to protect campers from traffic, portable toilets and wash stations, regular garbage pick-up.

### 3. Activate debris pick-up or cleaning

Schedule collection of debris associated with or near encampment. Consider capacity of and cost to local waste management service sites and landfills.

### 4. Initiate closure/removal

Remove the encampment and using enforcement or other interventions (ex: re-planting vegetation, warning signage, regular outreach) to prevent re-encampment. Consider availability and location of temporary shelter or triage facilities. When closure/removal is the recommended intervention, it is critical for all responding parties to be aware of the steps outlined in this protocol document. See Appendix for detailed closure/removal protocol.

## Appendix: Protocol for Closure/Removal of Encampment

### *Identifying or providing alternate shelter before removing non-obstructing encampments*

Prior to removing an encampment, the County must document offers of available, accessible housing or other shelter for encampment occupants. The alternate shelter shall be available to the encampment occupant starting on the date an encampment removal notice is posted and shall continue to be available until the encampment removal is completed. A daily list of shelter and housing alternatives will be maintained by Encampment Response Coordinator and shared with other staff as needed. The alternate shelter may include linkages to housing programs and shelter programs with or without day programs. Offers of shelter shall be made on an individual basis and, to the extent possible, be based on the individual needs of each encampment occupant. In making offers of shelter, the County shall consider any applicable local, state or federal statute, case law, order or other guidance related to shelters and public health and safety. In making offers, the County shall also consider the eligibility or admittance criteria for a particular shelter. The County shall, to the extent possible, ensure that the individual offeree can satisfy the admittance criteria that may apply to the shelter offered. Information about warming and sobering centers may be provided as additional information only but shall not be considered to satisfy the requirement to offer alternate shelter.

### *Encampment removal and notice requirements*

A notice shall be posted by the entity responsible for the property being closed/cleared, with the Encampment Response Team, on or near each tent or structure that is subject to removal stating: (1) the day the notice was posted; (2) the date the removal is scheduled; (3) the time range in which that date's removal will commence, which range may be no more than four hours; (4) where personal property will be stored if removed by the County; (5) how personal property may be claimed by its owner (6) the date when stored items will be disposed of; and (7) contact information for an outreach provider that can provide shelter alternatives. If individuals are present at the encampment, verbal notice and written notice shall if reasonably possible, be given to the individuals that the encampment is subject to removal as provided for in the posted notice. The notice shall be posted no fewer than 72 hours before an encampment removal and shall provide a removal date no more than 7 days after the notice posting date. If the action to physically remove the encampment is not commenced by the County within the removal date and time range provided in the notice, the County shall repost notice of the encampment removal before removal may occur. The County may diligently pursue to completion a removal properly commenced during the removal date and time range. The notice shall be printed in English, Spanish, and any other language the County determines would further the purpose of the notice. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the County from posting notice that the removal of a large encampment will occur over a period of several days, provided each day's operations start during the period identified in the notice. Some encampment sites include tents and structures separated by infrastructure such as off-ramps; removal operations may proceed through such sites so long as they start on some portion of the sites within the times specified on the notice. Posting of noticed shall be video-recorded by the posting officer(s) and saved/stored based on department protocol (currently a minimum of 3 years).

### *Outreach for encampment removals*

Should shelter or other housing be available, it will be communicated to the occupants by the Encampment Response Team representatives or designated outreach/shelter staff in advance of the closure. Encampment Response Team representatives or designated outreach/shelter staff shall visit each encampment site at least once daily between the time that notice of removal is posted and the scheduled removal date; if the encampment dweller is present, visits may include sorting items for clearing/storage. Encampment Response Team representatives or designated outreach/shelter staff shall be present at the commencement of removal activities on the date an encampment removal is scheduled to start according to the posted notice and shall be available to offer shelter alternatives and other services (transportation, basic needs) until the encampment removal is completed. Encampment Response Team representatives or designated outreach/shelter staff may leave an encampment removal operation after outreach services have been refused by all people present at the site. Encampment Response Team representatives or designated outreach/shelter staff shall return to a site if an individual requests services before the encampment removal is completed.

### *Storage of personal property removed from an encampment*

The party(ies) removing the camp, designated by the County, shall offer to store personal property (when removing obstructions and immediate hazards, or when removing encampments). The County has no obligation to store personal property that is reasonably understood to be waste (for example, empty single-use food storage containers), hazardous (for example, a needle-strewn tent), or is reasonably expected to become a hazard during storage (for example, wet bedding materials). At the time of closure/removal of encampment, the County will make a cart with lock for personal storage available to each person residing in the encampment. Items will be packed by the owner, supervised by the County contractor. The contractor will relocate the storage cart to a secure site, and the property owner shall be notified how to access property. A contracted service provider would be available by appointment only, through a phone number, to provide access to retrieve belongings for up to 90 days. After 90 days, any remaining items would be disposed of.

Encampment Response Coordinator shall identify the site and the date of the encampment removal on a County web page. The notice posted on the webpage shall identify: (1) the dates personal property was removed from the site; (2) if the personal property was stored; and (3) how the stored personal property may be claimed by its owner. This notice shall not be removed by the County for a minimum of 10 days. The County shall maintain a log of personal property removed from an encampment. Personal property that is not recovered after 90 days from and including the day the property was stored may be discarded or donated by the County.

### *Encampment site cleanup*

All County personnel, vendors, outreach workers, and other personnel necessary for an encampment removal and cleanup shall be present at the start of an encampment removal, and actions shall be video-recorded. The County shall take reasonable steps to segregate personal property (e.g. clothing) from material that is not personal property (e.g. park bench),

provided the segregation does not pose a danger to the individual segregating the personal property from the other material. Tents and structures that were not previously posted with a notice but are in the immediate area of tents or structures that were posted with a notice may be removed if the tent or structure was placed in the immediate area after notices were posted. All personal property that is removed from the site shall be stored as provided for in the previous section of this document and may be recovered as provided for a subsequent section of this document. The County/contracted vendor may remove and dispose of personal property that is reasonably understood to be waste (for example, empty single-use food storage containers), hazardous (for example, a needle-strewn tent), or is reasonably expected to become a hazard during storage (for example, wet bedding materials). When a person refuses to leave the camp at the point of closure and all protocols have been followed regarding offers of alternative shelter and personal property, the matter may be referred to the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office will assess and determine next steps to gain compliance for the removal of the encampment.

If feasible given the location, fencing shall be considered for a minimum of 10 days in order to prevent re-encampment in the area. The Encampment Response Team will attempt to revisit closed areas to prevent a reoccurrence of an encampment whenever possible. A reoccurrence may require the posting process begin again.

#### *Post-encampment removal notice*

A notice shall be prominently posted to fencing installed at the site where an encampment has been removed and the site cleaned up. The notice shall state: (1) the date the cleanup was performed; (2) whether personal property was stored by the County; (3) where the personal property is stored; (4) how any stored personal property may be claimed by its owner; (5) the date when stored items will be disposed; and (6) contact information for outreach personnel who can assist individuals with shelter alternatives and other services. This notice shall not be removed by the County for a minimum of 10 days. The department organizing the cleanup shall, within 2 business days of the cleanup, send electronic documentation of the cleanup to Encampment Response Coordinator in the format required for recording and updating the encampment record in Fulcrum.

#### *Recovering stored personal property*

Individuals claiming that personal property has been removed from an encampment may contact Encampment Response Coordinator, who will inform the individual how the property may be recovered. The individual shall describe the personal property with particularity. No identification is required for an individual to recover the property. The log of personal property shall indicate who received the recovered property. A contracted service provider may be available by appointment only, through a phone number, to provide access to retrieve belongings for up to 90 days. After 90 days, any remaining items may be disposed of. Storage and recovery of personal property shall be at no cost to the individual that owns the property.