

**COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA**  
**ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE PROTOCOL: OPERATIONAL PROCESSES**

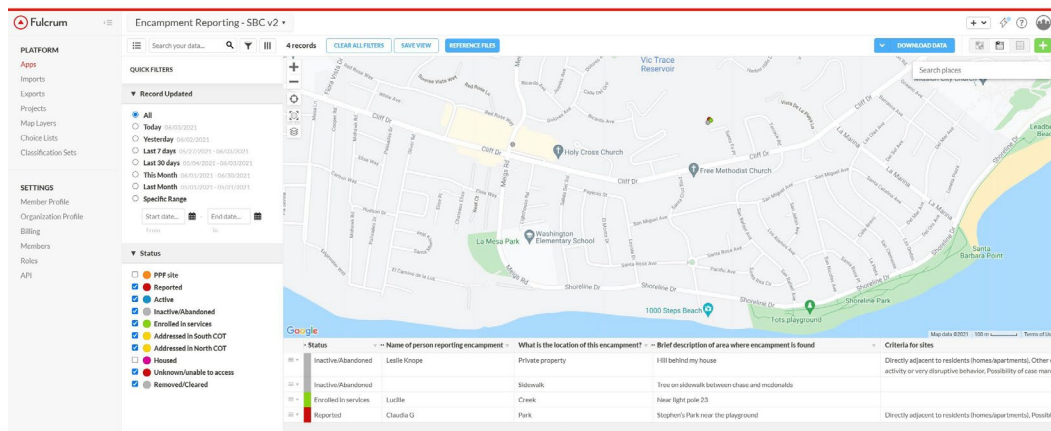
**Operational Process for Responding to Encampment Reports**

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. Team members from all departments/agencies conducting encampment assessments should seek and complete training programs within their departments/agencies that provide instruction on physical safety measures and techniques that maximize personal safety of all team members. It is recommended that at no time should any team

member visit any encampments without at least one other team member from the departments/agencies needed to assess that encampment.

4. **Master Map/List of Encampments:** Encampment Response Team and ongoing outreach representatives utilize mapping software (as shown below) 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.



5. **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.
6. **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.
  - a. Encampment Response Team will consider the availability of shelter or housing opportunities, as well as other necessary resources.
  - b. Encampment Response Coordinator manages 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.

### **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

After consulting with the departments and agencies listed above, the Community Services Department Director may determine an encampment represents a threat to public health and safety, in which case the requirement to identify or provide alternative shelter shall not apply, thereby expediting the closure process for such encampment.

### **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

- Whether or not the encampment exists in a waterway. If the encampment does exist in a waterway, the Director for the Community Services Director may direct that encampment to be posted and closed with identifying or providing alternative shelter, thereby expediting the closure process for any such encampment.
- 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 (AGWM) -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.