

Coordinated Responses to Unsafe Outdoor Living Conditions

ISSUE

The Saskatoon Fire Department (SFD) has identified an increase in unsafe outdoor living conditions that requires a whole community approach when responding to extreme weather and unsafe outdoor living conditions. This is a complex issue with risks to life safety for those who are without adequate housing.

BACKGROUND

At the February 22, 2021, Regular Business City Council meeting, information was received by Director of Emergency Planning on the need to review and update the Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy (the Strategy). The SFD identified the potential for imminent risk for residents and relatives who are living outdoors in unsafe living conditions.

CURRENT STATUS

Organizations acknowledge that the best approach is coordinated and collaborative to meet the complex needs of residents and relatives. A whole community response is critical. Public safety for all residents and relatives requires key coordination and communication to bring organizations together. This approach enhances the dignity and well-being of residents and relatives.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy

The Strategy was initially developed in 2012 and has been reviewed annually, taking a whole community approach to address the risk for residents and relatives who are houseless and without options for safe shelter during extreme cold weather. It is designed to collaborate with existing services to ensure situational awareness and coordinated efforts to provide a safe place during extreme cold weather.

The Saskatoon Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) leads the Strategy and works with service providers to offer an additional layer of coordination for outreach services during activations. This includes longer hours of operation and widespread coverage.

The City of Saskatoon (the City) provides support to the Strategy through Saskatoon Emergency Management Organization (EMO), SFD, Saskatoon Transit, and utilizing the City's social media accounts. Saskatoon Transit's [Safe Bus Service](#) is always available and allows residents to flag down a bus or go to a parked bus. Transit operators are required to immediately contact emergency services to provide assistance. The EMO provides coordination support, with the use of notifynow, to send Strategy activation notices to partner organizations that includes a List of Warm-up Locations (Appendix 1).

Unsafe Living Conditions – Unhoused People

The SFD has a responsibility to mitigate situations that pose a risk to life safety and property. In October 2021, the SFD activated the Emergency Operations Centre to coordinate a collaborative response for the safety and well-being of residents and relatives living in unsafe outdoor living conditions. A process map has been developed to navigate stakeholders through a repeatable framework (Appendix 2).

When an unsafe outdoor living condition is identified, SFD bylaw inspectors respectfully approach the residents and relatives and conduct a risk assessment. When required, partnering organizations include Sawēyihotān, The Salvation Army, Ministry of Social Services, Saskatoon Police Service, and the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Onsite offers of support include access to transportation, income assistance workers, mental health and addiction support, emergency shelter, meals, access to COVID-19 vaccine, and any other needs that can be met. If residents and relatives decline support, the SFD continues to visit and offer supports. Many times, after the second or third visit, the residents and relatives often take some form of support.

In a respectful manner, the removal of encampment debris is facilitated by the SFD. This approach supports the City's Parks, Roadways, Fleet and Support and external agencies such as The Meewasin Valley Authority, Canadian Pacific Railway, and Canadian National Railway where residents and relatives may seek shelter.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

At this time there are no financial implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

The SFD will conduct an evaluation in the second quarter of 2022.

APPENDICES

1. Cold Weather Strategy Warm-up Locations
2. Response to Unsafe Outdoor Living Locations

Report Approval

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