



City of Yakima

News Release

Subject: Homeless Emphasis Task Force

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Release Date: Friday, November 22nd, 2019

Task Force Helps Homeless Find Shelter, Food, Services

Local non-profit service providers and staff from several City of Yakima divisions and departments teamed up early Thursday morning to reach out to people camping on public property and point them toward safe, temporary housing, regular meals, and other services.

The task force included representatives from Yakima Union Gospel Mission, Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, and Sunrise Outreach. More than a dozen current residents of Camp Hope joined the task force, which also included staff from the City's Code Administration Division, Refuse Division, Public Works Department, Police Department, and Legal Department. The task force was formed in light of a notable recent increase in spontaneous camping on public property (sidewalks, parks, etc.). A City of Yakima ordinance passed in 2016 prohibits camping on public property.

Signs providing notice of the City's no-camping on public property ordinance have been posted at locations where people are known to sometimes camp.

"Early Thursday morning (about 5:00 am), the task force went to places where people were camping and let the people staying there know that what they were doing is not allowed in the city," said Communications & Public Affairs Director Randy Beehler. "People staying in the campsites were offered transportation to either the Yakima Union Gospel Mission or Camp Hope," said Beehler.

The primary objective of the task force is to ensure the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness and the safety of the general public.

"If people who were given the opportunity to access safe, temporary housing, regular meals, and other services chose not to take advantage of it, they had the option to simply vacate the campsite," said Beehler. "People living in a prohibited campsite who refused to leave or go to a shelter could be arrested. Fortunately, that was not necessary Thursday morning."

Of the more than 15 people contacted by the task force early Thursday morning, two voluntarily went to the Union Gospel Mission.

Several shopping carts from local retailers were retrieved and will be returned to the stores from which they were taken.

"Addressing homelessness is a complex challenge that requires the involvement of the entire community," said Beehler. "The task force is playing a small but important role in that effort."

The task force will continue to be deployed periodically.