



City of Yakima

News Release

Subject: Homeless Emphasis Task Force

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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 overnight to reach out to people camping on public property and point them toward safe, temporary housing, regular meals, and other services.

The task force, which included representatives from Yakima Union Gospel Mission, Transform Yakima Together, Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, and the City's Code Enforcement Division, Refuse Division, Public Works Department, Police Department, and Legal Department, 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.

"Early this morning, 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 the Transform Yakima Together shelter. The personal belongings of people who accepted the offer are being stored temporarily at the City's Public Works facility," 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 this morning."

Of the 13 people contacted by the task force early this morning, eight agreed to be transported to a shelter and five simply vacated campsites. No one was arrested. A conviction of violating the City's unlawful camping ordinance can result in a fine of up to \$1,000, up to 90 days in jail, or both.

"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 if necessary.