

# ENCAMPMENT PROTOCOL ENGAGEMENT FAQ

## What is an encampment?

An encampment is an abode such as a tent or unmovable structure, of one or more persons on public property or an accumulation of unmovable personal belongings that are present even when the individual is not.

### *An encampment is not:*

- An abode set up on private or federal property. The District only has jurisdiction over District government property.
- Gatherings of individuals during the day that have not set up an abode.
- Individual(s) that sleep at a location but have not set up living quarters and take their belongings when they leave.
- Moveable belongings, such as a shopping cart or stroller.
- Panhandlers. (Please note that panhandlers also may not be experiencing homelessness.)
- General trash left on public space.

## What is the goal of outreach and an Encampment Protocol Engagement (cleanup)?

The goal for the encampment response team—and the continuous outreach to individuals living in encampments by homeless service providers and mental health professionals—is twofold: 1) enroll residents in safer, healthier living arrangements through an array of homeless services, housing resources, and mental health services; and 2) address immediate and persistent public health and safety issues that exist.

## How do I report a potential encampment?

You can report an encampment to the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services (DMHHS) at [encampment.reports@dc.gov](mailto:encampment.reports@dc.gov) or (202) 727-7973. If our team is already aware of the reported site, that information will be provided to the reporting constituent. If not, our outreach staff will visit the site to conduct an assessment to see if it meets the criteria for an Encampment Protocol Engagement. If an encampment is located on federal or private property the request will be forwarded accordingly. **If you have an immediate safety concern, you should call 911 immediately.**

## How does an Encampment Protocol Engagement get activated?

If the site is determined to be an encampment that presents a health, security, or safety risk, and/or interferes with community use of public space, DMHHS coordinates with other District agencies to schedule and conduct an Encampment Protocol Engagement (cleanup). The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) posts signs at the identified encampment site and must provide at least 14 days' notice that an Encampment Protocol Engagement will happen. Leading up to an Encampment Protocol Engagement, DMHHS, the Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) conduct outreach on site. The outreach teams connect with individuals at the encampments, offer services, and make them aware of the upcoming Encampment Protocol Engagement.

Encampment clean ups are a cross-agency effort, including DMHHS, DDOT, DBH, DHS, the Department of Public Works (DPW), and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). With all agencies present, the cleanup can proceed.

If an **immediate** health or safety concern is identified on site, an immediate disposition may be conducted.

## What is the city doing about encampments?

The District's encampment response effort is twofold—outreach staff engage residents daily and work to enroll residents in safer, healthier living arrangements through an array of homeless services, housing resources, and mental health services. It can take time to build these relationships and make meaningful service connections. Encampment Protocol Engagements (cleanups) are done to address health and safety risks that may arise at encampment sites.

## Why don't people go into shelter?

Individuals may choose to not go into shelter for a number of reasons including:

- Unwillingness/inability to go to shelter (reasons for this can range from previous bad experience, desire to live outdoors, perception of shelter as being a dirty place)
- Current encampment location provides shelter from natural elements
- Individual feels a connection to the surrounding neighborhood
- Mental health condition may hinder them from accepting services

## Why does the city have to do a cleanup? Can't you just let people live there?

The District holds the health and safety of all residents paramount. Illegal camping leads to a number of health and safety issues, including:

- Garbage that attracts rodents and other vermin
- Lack of running water and electricity, which prevents proper storage of food and medicine and can facilitate the spread of food-borne diseases
- Weather conditions can increase the risk of frostbite and hypothermia in cold winter and severe sunburn and heat stroke in hot weather
- Cooking in close quarters or inside tents can cause fires

## If there are services available why don't people use them?

While everyone is different and reasons for rejecting shelter vary, it is not uncommon for some people to reject services. People can be resistant to housing and shelter for a number of reasons, and mental health can play a role. Outreach workers cannot force people to accept shelter or housing, however, they have many tools to help motivate and encourage people to move, the most important of which building a strong and trusting relationship.

## Why does the city allow people to move back right after a cleanup has been done?

There is a public expectation that during an Encampment Protocol Engagement encampment residents will vacate the posted public space ahead of the scheduled cleanup, remove or store with the District all belongings that are present on site that persons intend to keep, and if the individual is experiencing homelessness, that they will, with the District's support, seek shelter in a safer, healthier place.

The District understands the community frustration with the return of encampments, and appreciates the question; however, the District is working within the legal constraints that require adequate notice and due process prior to conducting a clean-up. In addition, enforcing public space usage through citations has proven to be both ineffective and to increase barriers to employment and housing, thereby exacerbating the problem.