

CAMP CLEAN-UP PROCEDURES

BELLINGHAM POLICE DEPARTMENT

2020



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Mission

To reduce illegal camp sites within the City of Bellingham.

Objective

By combining the efforts of the Bellingham Police Department and the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), we will work to offer outreach and reduce the illegal camp sites in the city to make our outdoor spaces safe for everyone.

We will strive to set clear, consistent expectations and standards for all community members.

Tasks

The Police Department is responsible for maintaining and prioritizing an illegal camp list. The tracking of illegal camps is complaint driven.

The illegal camp sites, that meet specific criteria, will be identified and cleaned weekly by a City contracted clean-up crew.

Prior to the clean-up, sites will be assessed and outreach offered. The remaining illegal camp sites are tagged with a five-day courtesy notice to vacate. Illegal camps located on City park property or obstructing a right-of-way are also addressed during the clean-ups.



CLEAN-UP PROCEDURE

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

1. The Police Department and Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) are made aware of complaints and reports of illegal camp locations directly or via the City of Bellingham Camp reporting process and mapping system.

<https://cob.org/services/safety/police-services/reporting/homeless-camp>

Approximately 1938 reports have been received since 2018

2. HOT visits the reported sites to attempt to verify and make an assessment as to the size, occupants and general state of the camp. If verified and needed, HOT attempts to offer outreach and notify of available resources. Outreach is not always accepted.

Approximately 100 new reports are received each month. Some may be duplicates of the same location.

3. HOT documents site visit findings and this information is forwarded to Claudia Vizcarra, the Bellingham Police Department Encampment Clean Up Coordinator. She will then determine if an active camp requires a scheduled clean-up.

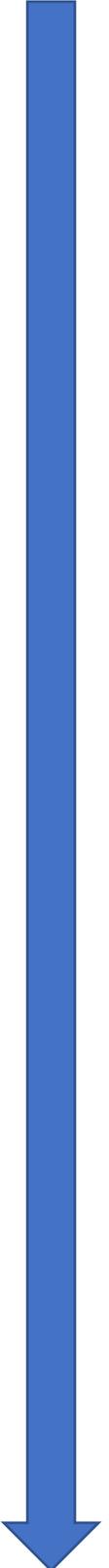
Approximately 372 current reports are active camps

4. This active camp list is prioritized by the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator based on its overall impact to the location. The criteria for this triage is made up of potential or current safety, health, and environmental impacts and hazards. This prioritization is always ongoing and can change based on the current status of the camp sites.

See Encampment Clean-Up Criteria page

5. Once the active camp list is prioritized, a camp clean-up site list is compiled by the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator and scheduled, generally for the next week. City Park locations and City rights-of-way are also frequently scheduled for clean-up and included on this list. These locations are off limits with no camping allowed at any time.

Also see Step 13



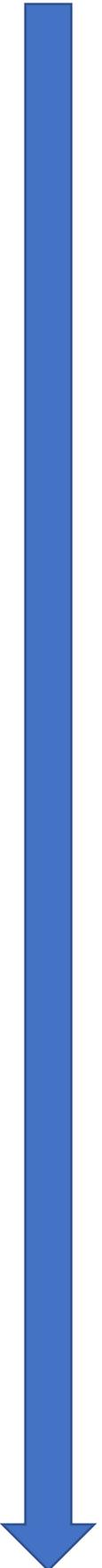


6. An informational packet including photos, maps, specific site information and instructions is created for the scheduled locations. This packet is created by the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator for use by officers assisting in the clean-up process. The packet is specific to the scheduled date and locations to be addressed on that clean-up day.

See Officer Information Packet Information

7. A camp clean-up security overtime detail is posted at the Police Department for the scheduled clean-up dates. Typically, two officers are hired to perform the detail through the Patrol Division's overtime budget. These Patrol officers are not involved in the Outreach Division's camp clean-up process as part of their assigned duties. The officers voluntarily sign up for this detail and may or may not have worked it before. The officers follow the direction of the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator and generally have no knowledge of camp clean-up activities and do not determine clean-up sites or schedules. The officers' primary function is that of security for the clean-up crew. The officers are provided the informational packet and are briefed on the scheduled locations at the beginning of their detail. The officers communicate with the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator throughout the detail to seek any needed clarification or report changes or compliance at the site locations.
8. Prior to the scheduled clean-up day, the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator will inform members of HOT what sites are on the list. HOT will attempt, as time allows, to connect people with services during the five-day courtesy period between tagging notification and scheduled clean-up. HOT will advise the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator if the status of the camp changes. HOT will continue to offer outreach if accepted.
9. The Encampment Clean Up Coordinator will coordinate site cleaning on the day of the scheduled clean up. The City contracted private clean-up crew will meet with the officers working the detail. All will be briefed on the plan and schedule for the day. The information packet created by the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator is provided as a reference and guide for that specific day and scheduled locations.
10. Prior to any clean-up, the Encampment Clean-Up Coordinator will assess the current state of the scheduled clean-up sites. The camps will then be addressed accordingly based on the Encampment Clean-Up Coordinator's assessment and recommendations.

THIS STEP HAS BEEN ADDED TO BETTER ADDRESS THE CHANGING CAMP STATUS AND COVID PRIORITIZATION.





11. Officers will travel with the clean-up crew to the scheduled clean-up sites. The officers will provide scene security and vacate any occupants at the scheduled clean-up sites. If necessary, the officers may be required to issue trespass warnings or address any other problems that may occur. Once vacated and the area determined safe, the crew will begin the clean-up process. The clean-up crews are not to contact the camp occupants.

12. Guidelines and criteria exist to determine if any property is to be saved at a clean-up site. For example, personal property, or items arranged in a manner that would suggest ownership are collected and impounded. The impounded property is then brought to the Police Department where it is stored for safe keeping for 60 days. The Encampment Clean Up Coordinator manages the retention of this saved property. The guidelines and criteria for property retention were developed through the City legal department. The Encampment Clean Up Coordinator will also work with individuals to attempt to locate property that they believe may have been collected from a camp site.

See Guidelines for retained property page for details

13. During the scheduled clean up detail, officers will also visit sites identified by the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator for tagging notification. Once tagged, the occupants of the sites are typically given a five-day courtesy period to collect their belongings and vacate the site. This notification is not required and is provided as a courtesy. The courtesy period is provided to give camp occupants the opportunity to comply and vacate the area. Notification stickers are used to physically tag the scheduled sites with green tags for Park property and orange tags for City streets, bridges, sidewalks and City rights-of-way. The tags show the date of the scheduled clean-up of that location. These sites are then scheduled for clean-up, usually the following week. HOT is notified about each site tagged and the scheduled date for clean-up. From time to time, situations arise where an extension or special accommodations are given. These exceptions are at the discretion of the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator and are often a result of communications with HOT and strategies they are attempting with the occupants at that location.





14. Once a camp is tagged and the courtesy period passes, it is subject to clean-up at any time. This would occur during a future scheduled clean-up day when the City contracted clean-up crew is out cleaning sites. Efforts are made to set clear, consistent expectations and standards with the notification and clean-up of the sites and their occupants. Locations on City Park property and City rights-of-way can also be tagged. A courtesy period is preferred but may not always be possible in these areas based on conditions, impact and safety. Some of these off-limit sites may be scheduled for clean-up each week due to the constant camping and impact to the area. This is done to discourage camps being set up repeatedly and to set clear expectations for these off-limit areas.

See Tag Notice page

15. Once the scheduled clean-up day is complete, the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator will again communicate with HOT to determine and prioritize a new list for the following week. Often a camp will take longer to clean-up than expected and will need additional days to complete. In these cases, the camps are scheduled for the next week if possible. The remaining camps will go back into the list of active camps. This new list now consists of the camps that were just tagged and notified, new reported active camps and the any remaining camp sites from that week's clean-up.

16. At the end of each clean-up day, the retained property is impounded at the Police Department by either the officers or the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator. The Encampment Clean Up Coordinator is available to meet with individuals if they believe their property may have been collected.

17. The Encampment Clean Up Coordinator and HOT continue to monitor the list of active camp sites. Once prioritized, a new informational packet of tagged camps and locations is prepared for the next scheduled clean-up day.

18. The camp clean-up process is repeated and adjusted as needed each week. Clean-up procedures can also be adjusted and modified as needed. Any changes in procedure are at the discretion of the Encampment Clean-Up Coordinator. Breaks in the clean-up schedule do occur at times. These may be the result of the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator's schedule, clean-up crew availability, officer availability or emergency conditions which may limit the clean-ups. All clean-up activity is prioritized and scheduled. Indiscriminate sweeps are not conducted. The Patrol Division does not conduct camp clean-ups. All camp clean-up activity is planned, scheduled and overseen by the Encampment Clean Up Coordinator and is a function of the Outreach Division.





Encampment Clean-Up Criteria

All camps scheduled for clean-up are illegal and the camps have been identified through complaints and reports. The camp site has been verified and classified as an active camp. The camp clean-up schedule priority is established based on the totality and overall impact, condition and hazard level at each illegal camp location.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

Health hazards:

- Hypodermic needles
- Rats and other vermin
- Human waste and bodily fluids
- Accumulation of garbage and rotting items
- Large number of individuals living in close proximity with no sanitary precautions or public health measures in place.

Environmental hazards:

- Damage to sensitive areas such as waterways, wetlands and vegetation. Areas where trees have been cut down and wildlife areas disturbed.
- Erosion
- Chemicals and propane tanks - dumping and unsafe storage.
- Human waste and other fluids leaking or dumped into waterways, soil or drains.
- Fires

Safety hazards:

- Criminal activity such as assaults, domestic violence, sexual assaults, illegal drug activity, drug overdoses, illegal alcohol use, stolen property, malicious mischief and graffiti.
- Proximity to schools and daycare facilities.
- Fire hazards near or inside buildings, residences, apartment complexes, bridges, overpasses, retaining walls and flammable material storage areas.

City Parks and City rights-of-way are **off-limits** with no camping allowed at any time.



During COVID:

Camp clean-up operations were paused as the COVID-19 precautions increased in our community. After approximately six weeks with no scheduled clean-ups, the number and size of reported camps increased significantly. Many of the previously listed hazard criteria appeared to be growing and were becoming more obvious. Some of the observations included increased rat activity, human feces, foul odors, encroachment onto City rights-of-way and structures and shelters being constructed under bridges and roadways. Many of these structure locations created an immediate fire and health risk to nearby residences and apartment complexes. We received concerns about several of these locations directly from the City of Bellingham Fire Marshal's Office.

Due to the growing unsafe and dangerous camp conditions in the community, camp clean-ups were resumed. The criteria for a camp clean-up was temporally shifted from a primary focus on the camp being illegal, to the safety and hazard level of the camp. All the previous listed hazards were considered, and the prioritization was now primarily based on the impact and level of hazard at the location. The camps determined to be the most hazardous were given priority and addressed first. The Encampment Clean Up Coordinator is responsible for determining the degree of hazard and prioritizing the clean-up locations. City Parks and City rights-of-way remained off-limits with no camping allowed. These locations continued to be addressed as well.



Sweeps vs Clean-Ups:

The Bellingham Police Department does not conduct sweeps of homeless camps. Clean-ups are conducted on illegal camp sites that have been verified, mapped and prioritized based on existing criteria. These specific camps are then scheduled for clean-up.

Before the clean-up, outreach is offered, an assessment occurs, the camp is tagged with a notification of the clean-up date and prioritization occurs based on the assessment.

Sweeps - A homeless camp sweep is an indiscriminate disbanding of homeless encampments on public property and the removal of both homeless individuals and their property from that area. A complaint is not required, camps are sought out, the process is not prioritized, is random and does not provide any notification or outreach services.

Clean-ups – A camp clean-up is complaint driven with outreach services offered. We do not seek out camp locations. Community partners like HOT are made aware and verify reported camps. They can assist with housing, behavioral health issues and drug addiction. The active camps are prioritized based on their impact and hazard level. Camp occupants are given a five-day courtesy notice to gather their belongings and work with outreach services. After the grace period, a City contracted clean-up crew will clean the camp site and gather remaining items to make the area safe and help with environmental concerns.



Tag Notices

GREEN PARKS OWNED PROPERTY

NOTICE OF CLEAN-UP AND ORDER TO VACATE PARK OR OPEN SPACE

Overnight camping & littering is prohibited per BMC 8.04.080 and BMC 8.04.100. **Remove yourself and your belongings from this property by the date below.** "This property" means [_ _]. On the below date, the City will be conducting a clean-up of this property. Remaining on this property could subject you to being arrested for trespassing per RCW 9A.52.080. Littering could subject you to a civil infraction and a \$250.00 fine.

As part of the clean-up, the City will remove all remaining litter, garbage, refuse, waste and personal property. Litter, garbage, refuse, and waste left at the site will be discarded. Personal property that poses a health or personal safety risk will also be discarded. All other personal property left behind and collected by the City will be stored by the City at no cost for 60 days. Personal property collected by the City can be reclaimed by contacting the City at 360-778-8850. **Personal property not reclaimed within 60 days will be disposed of in accordance with RCW 63.32.**

Remove yourself and your personal property by:

_____ @ _____.

City of Bellingham Contact Number

360-778-8850

ORANGE CITY STREETS, BRIDGES, SIDEWALKS, CITY RIGHT-OF WAY

NOTICE OF CLEAN-UP AND ORDER TO VACATE CITY PROPERTY

Your presence on this property is not authorized. "This property" means [_ _]. Further, littering is prohibited under the Bellingham Municipal Code. **Remove yourself and your belongings from this property by the date below.** On the below date, the City will be conducting a clean-up of this property. Remaining on this property could subject you to being arrested for trespassing per RCW 9A.52.080. Littering could subject you to a civil infraction and a \$250.00 fine.

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Remove yourself and your personal property by:

_____ @ _____.

City of Bellingham Contact Number 360-778-8850



Guidelines for Retained Property:

Unless an item is trash or poses an immediate threat to public health or safety it should be gathered for storage as potential personal property.

Items that are arranged in a manner that suggests ownership (e.g.: items that are neatly folded or stacked, stored off the ground, hung or clearly on display or packed in a bag or box) should be gathered for storage.

If there is any uncertainty regarding whether an item should be thrown away or kept, it should be kept.

The following items listed below are the example that could be considered “personal property.” These items must be collected, and transported to the Bellingham Police Department:

Wallets	Identification	Credit Cards
Checks	Money	Purses
Jewelry/Watches	Medical Records	Bicycles (whole bicycles, not parts)
Personal Papers	Weapons	

These items must be easily identifiable and in plain view.

Items that are trash or pose a threat to the public health or safety will not be collected. The following are examples of conditions that will cause an item, including those examples listed above, to be immediately disposed of:

- Any items of personal property which are wet to the point of saturation, infested with bacteria from human or animal excrement or urine, mold, maggots, or other insects or vermin or rodents, or their feces, or that pose a health hazard.

The Service Provider has reasonable discretion to determine what items are discarded based on these outlined criteria.



Example of HOT communication to Encampment Clean Up Coordinator regarding sites that do not meet the clean-up criteria.

Found tent, fairly clean camp, left notice but no one present. Not a lot of garbage at tent but lots further down under trestle.

← 200 E. Laurel St.

Not a camp, just a bike chop spot

← 2500 Alabama St.

Sent photos to Claudia. 4 tents, fire pit, clean camp, active, no one home. Will go back tomorrow.

← Little Squalicum Beach

Spoke with camper who said she has a reservation at a campground on the 16th. Same camper just moved from State St. near Boulevard .

← Padden Trail



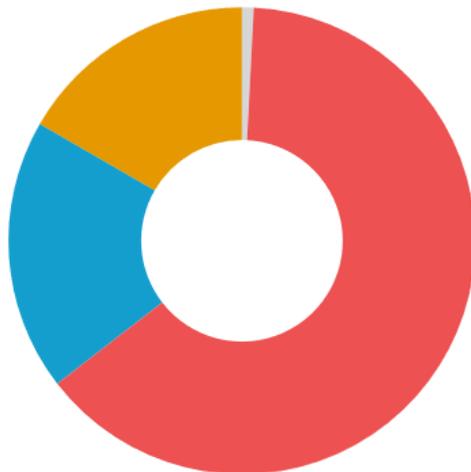
Active Reports
372

Last update: an hour ago

Site Status - Processed?

- ★ No
- Yes

Problem Types



- Null 3
- Camp with tents 237
- Tarps no tents 70
- Trash only 62

Last update: an hour ago

Last 30 Days

1000

Last update: an hour ago

Total Reports

1,938

Last update: an hour ago



Officer Information Packet

The Officer Information Packet is specific to the scheduled date and locations to be addressed on that clean-up day. A new packet is created each week. This internal BPD document is an informal guide meant to assist the officers through the clean-up day. The information within the document is developed by the Encampment Clean-Up Coordinator to assist the officers who may be unaware of the clean-up activities and do not know the prioritized clean-up schedule, history and prior activity related to the assigned clean-up sites. It includes maps, possible occupant information and notes which could be helpful. It was developed to create consistency and assist with the documentation of the clean-up activities. The information packet is an ever-evolving document. Changes in procedure and content can occur at the discretion of the Encampment Clean-Up Coordinator. The scheduled site locations in the packet are prioritized and may not all be addressed during the clean-up day. Some locations may take longer than expected or others may not take as long. The officers and clean-up crew are briefed at the beginning of the clean-up day. Officers will draw a case number for each site and the activity at the site is documented. The officers wear body worn cameras while conducting the clean-up activity. During the clean-up day, the Encampment Clean-Up Coordinator is available to provide any clarification or recommendations.