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**Date:** May 19, 2021

**To:** Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Commissioner JoAnn Hardesty  
Commissioner Mingus Mapps  
Commissioner Carmen Rubio  
Commissioner Dan Ryan

**Cc:** Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County Chair  
Marc Jolin, Joint office of Homeless Services  
Dr. Jennifer Vines, MCHD  
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Tom Rinehart, CAO, City of Portland

**From:** Lucas Hillier, HUCIRP Manager

**Re: REVISED Homelessness and Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program COVID-19 Protocol**

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On June 26, 2020, the Homelessness and Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program provided an update about the current conditions at encampments and developed a proposal for resuming campsite removals within Portland. Based on our analysis and feedback received, our COVID-19 Phase 1 Protocol has been ineffective, and we have determined the need to create more flexibility allowing the Impact Reduction Program to more quickly respond to issues resulting from high impact encampments.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the City of Portland has been closely following guidance issued from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Multnomah County Health Department. Between March and July 2020, the Impact Reduction Program did not remove any encampments, but continued to offer trash removal services, and has since provided and maintained approximately 135 hygiene units located in proximity to encampments throughout the city. Through the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS), the City has worked with dozens of outreach organizations to provide COVID-19 health and safety information and supplies to those living unsheltered to help make it safer for individuals to shelter in place.

As opposed to dispersing encampments categorized as “high impact,” the Impact Reduction Program has been dispatching more vendors to conduct trash mitigation and biohazard removal. The program is removing, on average, 650,000 pounds of garbage each month from encampments throughout the community. Outreach and service providers are also conducting active engagement and educating



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individuals on public health guidance and physical distancing requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19. In many encampments, tents and structures still do not adhere to these requirements. They are not allowing for the CDC-prescribed 12 x 12 feet of space per individual, providing six feet of separation between tents, and limiting gatherings to 10 or fewer people. Because of their location, many encampments prohibit the public from using sidewalks and accessing businesses, housing units, bus stops, and other amenities- violating the CDC-recommended six feet of distance. Additionally, several areas in town are now seeing accumulations of large amounts of personal property which has led to challenges related to ADA accessibility, site maintenance, and overall sanitation and public health.

At the end of July 2020, the Impact Reduction Program began removing a small handful of sites while adhering to certain requirements—primarily the Navigation Team began coordinating intensive outreach at encampments for an extended period. Following outreach, if individuals remained non-compliant with public health directives, we posted a 24-hour warning notice to provide individuals living in encampments additional time to comply. Following the posted warning, if individuals are still non-compliant, we post our standard 48-hour notice for full property removal. The goal of these postings is to gain compliance with public health guidance and to get individuals to decompress their spaces. However, we have found that encampments return to a state of non-compliance within a matter of days, if not hours, depending on the location.

We have been following this updated process since the end of July. Below are three site-specific examples to help illustrate our observations:

**Peninsula Crossing Trail:** The Impact Reduction Program has encouraged individuals at this location to comply with public health guidance on several occasions. We worked closely with the Navigation Team and saw no improvement in site conditions following outreach, warning, and posting notice. Partners from our Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) and Portland Police Bureau (PPB) continue to report individuals driving vehicles onto the pathway to access their encampment. Surrounding neighbors have raised concerns related to fires due to the proximity of campsites to buildings and infrastructure. Outreach providers have found that individuals experiencing homelessness are less likely to accept a shelter referral if encampments are allowed to remain in place.

**NE 60<sup>th</sup> and Prescott:** This encampment blocked ADA accessibility for weeks. Staff heard from people who rely on accessibility devices that there is no way they can safely use the sidewalk at this location to get groceries and prescription medications. Outreach teams were notified to assist with the ADA accessibility issues, but challenges continued as individuals were unable or unwilling to move property to allow for others to access the space. With current protocols in place, situations like this require higher level of resources which is unsustainable.

**Natural Areas (Big Four Corners, Cross Levee, Columbia Slough Trail, Foster Flood Plains, Beggars Tick, Brookside Natural area, etc.):** The Impact Reduction Program continues to receive multiple reports regarding trees being cut down in natural areas for the purposes of burning or building material. Individuals at these properties have continued to damage natural areas despite outreach providers' repeated attempts in these various encampments. We have been dispatching vendors to these locations as often as possible to remove garbage and hazardous materials, but without the ability to do full site removals, individuals are collecting extremely large amounts of property creating extensive environmental damage. Our cleanup and biohazard removal vendor had to use heavy machinery to remove large structures and hazardous materials.

There are several places in the downtown core (Old Town, inner eastside) and residential neighborhoods where sidewalks are unpassable, and individuals are unable or unwilling to allow for safe physical distancing and ADA accessibility. Subsequently, the accumulation of materials is currently unmanageable in several locations throughout the city.

The Impact Reduction Program has been attempting to reduce negative impacts of unsheltered homelessness while allowing individuals experiencing homelessness to shelter in place through the COVID-19 emergency. Unfortunately, we have been unable to successfully manage public spaces to a standard accepted as satisfactory with the tools we currently have available.

It remains important for the City to adhere to CDC guidance as it relates to homeless encampments, and it is also important for us to continue to manage our public spaces in a way that meets the needs of the entire community. Phase 1 protocol created challenges for housed and unhoused community members alike, and staff are seeking a more assertive approach. As a result of thorough discussions with the Multnomah County Health Department, the Impact Reduction Program will begin to immediately post locations where any one of the following is occurring:

- Untreated sewage is prevalent, leading to increased risks of exposure to Shigella or Hepatitis A; OR
- Locations determined to present a public health risk to both housed and unhoused community members due to the presence of biohazardous materials; OR
- Locations identified by Portland Fire & Rescue as being an extreme fire risk or blocking critical fire access; OR
- Verified reports of violence, arrest, or criminal activity; OR
- ADA access is blocked despite attempts by outreach to maintain ADA accessibility requirements; OR
- Encampments are impeding regular operations at schools.

The Impact Reduction Program needs to be able to act on locations quickly. Outreach capacity has been spread thin throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In the circumstances described above, staff must be able to post locations after conducting standard outreach, as the Impact Reduction Program operated prior to COVID-19. The Impact Reduction Program will continue doing everything it can prior to posting a campsite for removal to allow individuals to shelter in place, including:

- Dispatching Clean Start to assist in maintaining a low impact site, removing garbage, offering resource information, and communicating with individuals about *how* to maintain a low impact site;
- Coordinating with outreach providers to assist with extremely vulnerable individuals, educating individuals on fire/life safety information and information related to capital improvement projects or construction scheduled to take place in the immediate vicinity, and offering shelter/service referrals;
- Distributing survival gear provided by the Joint Office of Homeless Service's supply warehouse.

Following these activities, areas where the above issues continue to persist must be posted for full site removal.

The Impact Reduction Program will continue to prioritize encampments for posting/removal that meet the following criteria:

- Has eight or more structures; OR
- Is blocking someone's ability to use public sidewalks, paths, transit stations, public restrooms, or building entrances as intended without violating the guidance to maintain six feet of distance from other persons at all times; OR
- Scores 65 or higher on the Impact Reduction Program's Risk Assessment, primarily focusing on the "impact on neighborhood livability" and "conspicuous drug use" scores; OR
- Has received credible reports of criminal behavior (other than camping) related to an inhabitant of the campsite as verified by the Portland Police Bureau or the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office as pursuant to ORS 203.079.

Sites meeting these minimum thresholds would be prioritized for posting using the normal matrix criteria to determine which have the highest impact and thus require the most immediate intervention.

When cleaning a campsite, cleanup vendors will make best efforts to clean the site once campers have left the area to limit close interaction. If this is not possible, cleanup crews will request that items that are not claimed as property be placed six feet away so that vendors can safely dispose of materials.

All campsite cleanup vendors received COVID-19 specific outreach training in March of 2020 through JOHS. If individuals at any location present COVID-19 symptoms, crews will notify the Impact Reduction Program immediately so that staff can follow established protocols for screening and possible access to Voluntary Isolation Motels.

Thank you for your partnership in prioritizing public health and safety for our community as we navigate this crisis.

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