

Burnaby Extreme Weather Response Plan

1. Introduction

The Burnaby Extreme Weather Response (EWR) Plan sets the framework for temporarily creating local sheltering resources for homeless persons to prevent hardships due to extreme winter weather conditions within the municipality of Burnaby. Other communities in Metro Vancouver also have Extreme Weather Plans to meet their local needs.

The Burnaby Extreme Response Work Group, a subcommittee of the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness, is responsible for the operation of Burnaby's Extreme Weather Response. This group spearheaded the development of this Response in 2005 and has responsibility to conduct annual reviews. The Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (previously known as the Regional Cold/Wet Weather Strategy), through funding from the Federal Government's Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative, provides assistance with the planning and implementation process. BC Housing, since 2007, has provided support, including funding, for the operation of extreme weather responses throughout Metro Vancouver. The community members involved in the Burnaby Extreme Weather Response represent a broad array of organizations and agencies and represent the Burnaby Homeless Task Force.

Extreme Weather Response Work Group members:

- *Dave Brown* - *Lookout Emergency Aid Society – Lead*
- Rose Hare – St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church
- Sharon Folkes – City of Burnaby Planning Department
- James Pratt – EWR Regional Coordinator
- Karen O'Shannacery - Lookout Emergency Aid Society
- Pastor Norm Oldham – Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy
- Kevan Oxley – Burnaby Mental Wealth Society
- TBD – Burnaby Alliance Church
- Lou DeMaeyer – Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addiction

Community organizations:

- Lookout Emergency Aid Society
- City of Burnaby
- St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church
- Burnaby Alliance Church
- Progressive Housing Society
- Burnaby Mental Wealth Society
- RCMP – Southeast Office
- Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addiction
- Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness and its members

2. The Current Homelessness Situation

As elsewhere in the Lower Mainland and throughout Canada, the Burnaby community has a portion of their population sleeping in local parks, under bridges or other places conducive to sleeping rough. While long unrecognized in Burnaby, in 2001 the absolute homeless became more visible, leading a local agency (Progressive Housing Society) to initiate concerns with the municipality and the Fraser Health Authority. Funded by a HRSDC SCPI grant, Progressive Housing commissioned a report to help quantify the problem and to develop the community networks necessary to provide solutions.

In 2004, as a result of Progressive Housing's ongoing presentations around the needs for housing the homeless, local service providers, police, government representatives, residents, the faith community, and service clubs began to coalesce. The City responded with a successful recommendation to the Fraser Health Authority to fund an Outreach Worker. The Outreach Worker's main task was to update the statistical and anecdotal information around the local homeless population, and to strengthen community networks. This community network came together in 2005 to form the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness. The 2005 research funded by the Fraser Health Authority found 63 absolute homeless individuals living rough in Burnaby. This led to plans to formulate a coordinated response to local homeless issues.

The Homeless Count

At the present time it is difficult to get an accurate count of the homeless population in Burnaby. The most recent homeless count (completed on March 11, 2008) helps to provide the most accurate count of the homeless, although it is important to note that this count underestimates the number of homeless people, given that the count was at a single point in time with only known areas surveyed, 86 individuals were found to be homeless, including 9 people who stayed in the Extreme Weather Response shelter, an increase of 110% from the 2005 count and the second largest municipal increase within Metro Vancouver. In 2005 - 40 absolute homeless people lived in Burnaby, a 135% increase from a similar count (17 individuals) held in 2002. It is important to note that the stigma associated with homelessness often causes community members to retain low profiles and not attract attention.

Progressive Housing's Outreach Services estimates Burnaby's street homeless to be 250 individuals based on contacts and support provided over 12 months. The Burnaby Extreme Weather shelter opened 47 nights during the winter of 2008 2009 and provided shelter 1,173 times.

The Broader Homeless Population

The 2008 Metro Vancouver homeless count found 2,660 homeless individuals, of which 3% (59) considered Burnaby their home - down from 70 in 2005 but twice as many as the 29 found in 2002. While the total number of people who call Burnaby home decreased by 19% from the 2005 count, the number of Burnaby residents living rough increased by 17%.

Of the 59 individuals found homeless, 42 were living rough (vs. 36 in 2005) and 17 were housed in shelters (vs. 34 in 2005).

In addition to the homeless who access shelter in other municipalities in the lower mainland (primarily Vancouver), there are those in the homeless population who do not seek admission into shelters.

There are many areas in Burnaby where the homeless will sleep outdoors, such as under bridges, in private garages, and in cardboard recycling dumpsters. The homeless frequently mention couch surfing.

While there is no clear estimate of the size of the couch surfing broader homeless population, the Extreme Weather Response Plan must take the needs of the homeless who are forced to leave Burnaby and the couch surfers into account as well.

Homeless Shelters and Services in Burnaby

At present there are no shelters in Burnaby.

There are few services providing support to the homeless or persons living on low income in Burnaby. There are three local food bank locations operated by the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, one Mental Health drop in centre in Burnaby. A few faith groups operate meal programs within their facilities. The Burnaby Metrotown Salvation Army serves a soup and sandwich meal in the evening on Mondays at two locations, as well as a Community outreach Christmas Dinner. Progressive Housing operates a mobile Health Van four days-a-week to four different Burnaby locations, bringing supplies and services to homeless individuals.

The Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness operates an Outreach Resource Centre once a week at Southside Community Church on Walker near Kingsway.

Outreach Workers (operating out of Progressive Housing Society) are present for consultation, and Home Health Nurse (funded by Fraser Health) are on site weekly, as well as members of the Task Force, and volunteers from Progressive Housing, from many faith groups and the general public. An Outreach Worker is available on a regular basis at Progressive Housing Society.

3. The Extreme Weather Response Plan

The Extreme Weather Response Plan must meet the needs of a wide range of homeless people (e.g. men, women, youth over 18, seniors and families) in the community and be flexible enough to deal with a varying number of people including individuals who may be coping with challenging issues such as mental illness, addictions and other health issues. To meet these criteria, the following response has been developed.

Extreme Weather Alert

Extreme weather is defined as conditions deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless persons such as:

- Temperatures at or below - 2° Celsius (-0° with wind chill) {temperatures are not absolute and are flexible to other weather conditions}; OR
- Significant snow accumulation; OR
- Temperatures at 0° during times of extended rainfall that make it difficult or impossible for individuals to remain dry.; OR
- Freezing rain; OR
- Severe wind warning

Timeframe

The extreme weather response is implemented:

- Between October 15 and March 31 or whenever extreme weather occurs
- Intermittently during the five-month period as weather conditions determine need.
- When other shelters in Vancouver and New Westminster are not able to fill the need

Hours of Operation

- Night-time shelter, generally between 7:00 pm and 7:00 am.

Activation Team/ local coordinators

The following people, or their designate will decide when to call an extreme weather alert. They will make the determination based on local weather reports and the perceived need for shelter space in the community. This will include checking shelters closest to Burnaby for their occupancy/turnaway rates. Should the shelters be 95% full, and the absolute homeless willing to access shelter, an alert will be called.

Co-leaders

- Dave Brown – Lookout Emergency Aid Society (alternate Karen O'Shannacery)
- Norm Oldham – Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness

They, or their designated alternates, must be available 24/7 hrs/days to call an alert.

A list of possible duties and responsibilities for local coordinators is attached to the Plan.

Notification

The table in the appendix list the parties that will at a minimum be notified in the event of an Extreme Weather Alert. The purpose of the notification is to raise awareness of the severity of the weather and the potential impacts to the homeless and to provide information about the shelter and outreach that is being offered during the alert. These organizations will also receive information about how to get access to donated winter clothing and blankets which can be provided to homeless clients on an as needed basis. It is expected that all contacted agencies will ensure that their staff and clientele are made aware of this situation and resources. (see list at end of document). The EWR Work Group is responsible for regularly updating the Notification List. Lookout Emergency Aid Society has agreed to distribute the notifications by fax and/or email. Outreach to the street homeless will be offered by Progressive Housing and through Lookout.

Media Inquiries

All media inquiries will be directed to the Regional Extreme Weather Coordinator, James Pratt (250-920-7826) and Dave Brown (778-288-8887) as the spokespeople for the Burnaby Extreme Weather Response.

The Response

When an extreme weather alert is called, the following responses can be activated:

- Dave Brown from Lookout Emergency Aid Society (778-288-8887) or Norm Oldham will coordinate the response and send out email/fax notification by noon of the day of the response.
- A member of the Extreme Weather Response will be responsible for ensuring supplies and materials are on-hand to provide the response including: mats, bedding, pillows, first aid supplies, any extra health and safety equipment, etc. Clothing changes will be kept on-site and distributed freely as available through donations. Wherever possible emergency supplies, including cleaning supplies, will be moved to locations prior to an EWR Alert and kept secured for an EWR alert by the host site.
- Women with children and families will be referred to the Ministry of Housing and Social Development for housing.
- Youth (13-18) will be referred to Lower Mainland Purpose Society, and/or Covenant House or to the Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Until December 1st, adult men and women will be housed on mats located in the Church Hall (basement with separate entrance) of St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church, 6610 Balmoral St. Burnaby. 30 mats shall be made available.
 - Beginning on December 1st, the site will be moved to other locations, including Burnaby Alliance Church, 8611 Armstrong Ave, Burnaby.
 - Beginning on December 14, 2009, the site will be moved to the Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addiction at 3405 Willingdon Avenue, Burnaby.

- An alternative site is available at Burnaby Alliance Church, 8611 Armstrong Ave., Burnaby, where more than 30 individuals at one time require shelter or when St. Francis de Sales or other site may become unavailable.
- Where a mixed gender Extreme Weather location is used, the genders will be kept in separate areas and will be provided with privacy from the opposite sex. Close supervision will be provided to ensure no inappropriate access between the two spaces.
- When two or more locations are operational:
 - Couples and men and single women will all be housed at the same location in separated areas
- Supper and snack breakfast will be provided with support from community and faith groups. A member of the EWR working group will be appointed to coordinate meals, coffee and snacks. Where the EWR is expected to continue beyond one day, provision will be made for extra supplies to be on hand.
- Volunteers will be needed to help offer the Extreme Weather sheltering services. Tasks will include setting up and taking down the sheltering spaces and nightly cleaning, preparation and serving of food & hot beverages, distributing clothing, sorting donations, offering additional support and supervision to experienced shelter staff.
- Lookout Emergency Aid Society will provide a staff person(s) when the response is in place, supported by trained volunteers. Should trained volunteers not be available, Lookout Emergency Aid Society will provide a second staff person.
- The EWR working group will appoint a member will coordinate volunteers. A volunteer bank will be developed to assist when an Extreme Weather response is called.
- Free Bus tickets will be provided to those needing transportation to/from Extreme Weather shelter(s). Distance, mobility and weather conditions shall be the criteria used to determine eligibility for bus tickets. Where materials are needed to be moved for, during or after an alert, Lookout Emergency Aid Society, and others as available, will provide assistance with transportation.
- Where possible, Progressive Housing will provide additional support through their Health Van.
- The Extreme Weather Committee will endeavour to train volunteers through the regional Extreme Weather Response or services providing to the needs of the homeless.
- Extreme Weather resources will keep statistics on the provision of extreme weather service including numbers of shelter spaces available, number shelter spaces used on each night open, gender, any service turnaways and reasons for such. These statistics will be compiled and submitted to BC Housing and the members of the Burnaby EWR working group each morning of the response.

Deactivation

The Burnaby Extreme Weather Response will be deactivated when the weather no longer represents a substantial threat to the life of homeless people in Burnaby. The decision to maintain the response or deactivate will be re-evaluated daily by the Activation Team. The homeless using EWR resources shall be notified prior to leaving the EWR whether the EWR is deactivated for that day. Lookout Emergency Aid Society will be responsible to distribute the deactivation notice following the notification procedure above. The host site will post closure notices on the EWR doors.

4. Evaluation & Plan Revision

This plan has been developed for the 2009/2010-winter period. Before March 31, 2010, the Extreme Weather Working Group will reconvene to assess the implementation of the plan and to amend it as required. As part of the evaluation procedure, data collected by the organizations involved in the response will be collated and submitted to BC Housing and the members of the Burnaby EWR working group each morning of the response. Regular updates will be provided to the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness.