

Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan Revised October 15, 2009

Introduction

The Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the homeless sets the framework for expanding resources for homeless persons during the winter months to prevent hardships due to extreme winter weather conditions.

Each fall the Richmond Extreme Weather Response Planning Committee is comprised of community members that represent an array of organizations and agencies. They include:

Community Organizations:

- Salvation Army Richmond House
- Richmond Youth Service Agency
- St. Alban's Anglican Church

City of Richmond:

- Community Services Department
 - Affordable Housing Group
 - Social Planning Division
- Emergency Management Office

Regional Representation:

- Regional Extreme Weather Coordinator

The Current Homelessness Situation

The Metro Vancouver 24 Hour Homelessness Snapshot completed is completed once every two years. In March 2008 this Snapshot estimated that there are 56 homeless people in Richmond. Of those 56 people, 19 were in a shelter and 37 were on the street. This number is generally accepted as a conservative estimate, as it does not include those who choose to sleep outdoors and those who slip through the cracks in the social services system. However, the number does provide a starting point for planning as an adequate response for the homeless when an extreme weather alert is called. It is anticipated that any data collected through the Extreme Weather Response Program will build the knowledge of homelessness in Richmond.

Regular Shelter Capacity

There are a total of 10 shelter beds in Richmond for men. In addition, Nova House, a 10-bed transition house, provides shelter for women and their children fleeing abuse.

The Broader Homeless Population

There are those in the homeless population who do not seek admission into shelters. It is common knowledge that there are some areas in the City where the homeless will congregate outdoors. These areas are outlined in this Plan. In addition, the Airport Chaplaincy reports that there are a significant number of homeless people, primarily women who often have children or are pregnant, who end up at the airport. They arrive from flights into the City or they come to the airport from the surrounding communities for a warm dry place to stay where they can go unnoticed for a few days. While there is no clear estimation of the size of this broader homeless population, the Extreme Weather Response Plan takes their needs into account as well.

The Extreme Weather Response Plan

The Extreme Weather Response Plan meets the needs of a wide range of homeless people (e.g. men, women, youth over 18, seniors, and families) in the community and is flexible enough to address a varying number of people (as few as five to as many as twenty-five or more). To meet these criteria, the Richmond alert involves a range of options and levels of response.

Extreme Weather Alert

Extreme weather can include significant snow accumulations, severe winds or temperatures. Extreme weather is defined as:

- Conditions deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless persons; OR
- Any snow accumulation; OR
- Temperatures at or below -2 degrees Celsius (0 to -2 with a wind chill); OR
- Temperatures near 0 with rainfall that makes it difficult or impossible for homeless persons to remain dry.

Activation

The Richmond Emergency Management Office will decide whether to call an extreme weather alert by 10am of the first day of an extreme weather event, if possible. This allows adequate time to mobilize for the activation while minimizing the potential for staff overtime costs. This determination will be based on the definition of extreme weather as outlined above, Environment Canada weather reports, weather alert notifications, and the perceived need for additional shelter space in the community. St. Alban's Anglican Church shelters will continue to be activated, with Richmond House capacity being increased upon Extreme Weather Response activation.

Upon activation of the plan, St. Alban's will contact Richmond House to attempt to arrange for staffing at the activated site.

Notification

Multiple agencies and locations will 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 additional shelter that is being offered during the alert. A poster indicating the location of the activated shelter will be faxed or emailed to those agencies and businesses on the list. The poster can then be placed on display for the public to view. The poster will contain the phone number for the Salvation Army Richmond House as a point of contact for questions and to arrange transportation to the activated shelter site. The following is a list of the notification recipients:

BC Ambulance Services
BC Housing
Broadmoor Baptist Church
Chimo Crisis Services
City of Richmond:
 Affordable Housing Group
 Community Bylaws
 Community Services
 Corporate Communications
 Parks and Recreation
 Parks Caretakers
 Public Works Dispatch
 Social Planner
 Stores
Emergency Mental Health Services
Gilmore Park United Church
Ministry of Housing and Social Development
Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance
RCMP
Regional Extreme Weather Response Coordinator
Return It Bottle Depots
Richmond Addiction Services
Richmond Bethel Church
Richmond Centre Mall Security
Richmond Community Advisory Committee
Richmond Food Bank
Richmond Hospital Emergency Room
Richmond Hospital Social Workers
Richmond Public Library
Richmond Women's Resource Centre

Richmond Youth Service Agency
Salvation Army Community Church
Salvation Army Richmond House
St. Alban's Anglican Church
Touchstone Family Association
Vancouver Airport Chaplaincy
Vancouver International Airport Authority, Airport Operations
Volunteer Richmond Information Services

The Response

Additional Temporary Emergency Shelter

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

- The Salvation Army's Richmond House Men's Shelter, 3111 Shell Road, will be expanded by 6 spaces to a maximum of 16 spaces for men.¹
- St. Alban's Anglican Church, 7260 St. Alban's Road, will provide up to 16 shelter spaces.

Activation plans for each of the three sites have been developed. Each facility director will continue to manage their site, but may call upon other agencies for assistance.

Outreach

Agencies that have been notified of the activated temporary emergency shelters that have staff that interact with the homeless can alert the homeless to the dangers of hypothermia presented by the weather conditions and encourage them to seek shelter.

The following locations have been identified as potential outreach target areas:

- At Steveston Highway and Shell Road, south of Ironwood, in the adjacent wooded area
- Behind Park Road and Cooney Road, in the parkade
- Behind the former Legends Pub, across from Lansdowne Shopping Centre at Cooney and Lansdowne Road
- In Minoru Park
- In the Cultural Centre parkade (the Aquatic Centre is used as a place to keep warm)
- The Boy Scout Camp at Woodward's Landing

¹ The City of Richmond has indicated that, as long as the expansion of services at Richmond House is temporary and for emergency purposes, under the Extreme Weather Response Plan, regular City Bylaws pertaining to the number of people allowed to stay overnight in the house will be exempted.

- Alexandra Road (boarder up houses)
- Lang Park (Saba Road and Buswell Street)
- Capstan Way Marina
- Park area surrounding Nature Park

The Airport Chaplaincy will continue to monitor the airport for homeless people during the Extreme Weather Alert.

Timeframe

The extreme weather response usually occurs:

- Between November 1 and March 31
- Intermittently (5 – 10 nights per year) during the five-month period, as weather conditions and need dictates.

Hours of Operation

Nighttime shelters are available generally between 9:00 pm and 7:00 am. BC Housing encourages Extreme Weather Shelters to be open long enough for clients to obtain at least 8 hours of sleep per night.

Evaluation and Plan Revision

In the fall of each year, the Richmond Extreme Weather Planning Committee will reconvene under the direction of the Extreme Weather Regional Coordinator with the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy to review and amend the plan as required. As part of the evaluation procedure, data collected by the organizations involved in the response will be collated and distributed by BC Housing.

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