HUCIRP Cleanup Response Amidst COVID-19

The City of Portland’s Homelessness and Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program has been working closely with Multnomah County Public Health and the Joint Office of Homeless Services to address growing concerns regarding cleaning homeless encampments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are significant community concerns on all sides of this issue. We understand that there are people who feel cleaning camps and asking campers to relocate is disruptive and harmful. Others feel some of these camps are not safe places for anyone to reside in due to the presence of hazardous materials and unsanitary conditions.

While we are not discontinuing all cleanup activities, we will be increasing the threshold for what necessitates a cleanup. This means we are reducing the overall number of encampments we post and clean.

Effective March 13, 2020 we will be suspending the cleanups of locations that are posted each week regardless of their conditions. Weekly posted sites are in downtown and inner eastside locations that have been identified as high impact areas requiring routine maintenance above and beyond regular program protocols.

We will be focusing our efforts on encampments with significant presence of hazardous materials that clearly present a public health and safety risk. These are sites that have been assessed by trained personnel and meet our internal threshold for what merits a comprehensive cleanup.

We want the community to know that we will take extra care with individuals that we’re interacting with at camps and give them the time they need to relocate to a safer location. We understand that campers will often return the location after the cleanup has taken place, but our main concern right now is removing hazardous materials from the site and reducing the possibility of further spreading COVID-19.

Much thought and consultation has gone into this decision and we are continuously reevaluating our processes to ensure we keep our communities safe. We will continue to adjust our protocols as more information becomes available.

Adjusting campsite cleanups is one of a suite of ways the City is collaborating with partners to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the houseless community. The City is also placing hand-washing stations and bathrooms and assisting shelter programs to keep winter shelters open.