

Ventura County Continuum of Care – Encampment Response Guidance Policy

Approved by VC CoC Governance Board on August 13, 2025

In alignment with the Countywide Homelessness Memorandum of Understanding, the Ventura County Continuum of Care (CoC) is providing this guidance policy as a voluntary template aligned with State guidance. The policy is intended to support jurisdictions across the CoC's geographic area in developing consistent, coordinated approaches to encampment resolution. The aim is to facilitate effective outreach, connection to services, and placements into temporary shelter and permanent housing. The Ventura County CoC is committed to addressing homelessness with compassion, dignity, and respect.

Both the County and local cities have made significant investments in addressing homelessness through staffing, services, shelter, and housing solutions. Key CoC and County-led initiatives—such as the coordinated entry system, the Ventura County Homeless Management Information System (VC HMIS), and one-stop service centers throughout Ventura County—have strengthened connections to housing and supportive services. These include whole person care, street outreach, recuperative care, food assistance, rapid rehousing, emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, and housing navigation services.

Please note: The Ventura County CoC does not have jurisdictional authority over encampments and does not conduct encampment noticing or removal activities. This policy is not intended to be comprehensive, or to require the adoption of ordinances or amendments to existing ordinances, or to impose a one-size-fits-all approach for every jurisdiction. For example, a jurisdiction may choose to restrict camping in certain sensitive locations, such as near schools, limit camping to no more than one night in the same location or require a shorter or longer noticing period before removal depending on the circumstances.

Intent

This policy is intended to:

- Ensure the public health and safety of all Ventura County residents, including unhoused individuals.
- Support the transition of unsheltered individuals into interim and permanent housing through a person-centered, trauma-informed, and service-led approach.
- Balance the need for safe public spaces with individual dignity and civil rights.
- Align with the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH) and U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) best practices for encampment resolution.

As used in this policy, the term “encampment” refers to a location where one or more persons experiencing homelessness (unhoused) are living outside, in a place not meant for human habitation. For example, living in tents, makeshift structures, or vehicles with an accumulation of personal belongings.

Section 1. Pre-Enforcement Protocol and Supportive Response

Except in exigent circumstances presenting risk of harm to life, health, safety, or infrastructure, all of the following conditions should be met prior to any enforcement action under Section 2:

(a) Engagement and Offers of Shelter

Based on the needs of each unhoused individual camping outdoors, continuing efforts should be made to connect individuals to shelter and housing options funded by the County and cities ranging from providing shelter, hotels, safe camping/parking, affordable housing, permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and rental units, among other options. Jurisdictions or their designated outreach partners should:

1. Make documented, good-faith efforts to:
 - Engage all individuals residing in the encampment.
 - Offer shelter beds, housing navigation, and supportive services (e.g., mental health, substance use support, social services).
 - Identify individual needs and provide trauma-informed referrals.
2. Verify the availability of adequate shelter/housing/other resources before enforcement proceeds.

(b) Minimum of 48-Hour Notice to Vacate

A notice to vacate should be:

- Posted in a clearly visible location at the encampment at least 48 hours before enforcement.
- The notice should include:
 1. Date and time of the planned enforcement.
 2. Information about available shelter options, including contact details.
 3. How personal property will be handled, stored, and reclaimed.
 4. Instructions for accessing assistance.
 5. Translation or accessibility formats, as necessary.

(c) Timing and Validity of Notices

- Enforcement should not begin before the posted time/date.
- If enforcement does not occur within 48 hours of the posted date, a new 48-hour notice should be issued before proceeding.

(d) Site Assessment

Whenever feasible, a site assessment should be completed in advance of outreach and abatement efforts to determine whether an encampment presents risk of harm to life, health, safety, or infrastructure and should therefore be prioritized for outreach and abatement.

Section 2. Prohibited Conduct Related to Encampments

Efforts to resolve encampments should endeavor to maintain all publicly owned property free of prohibited activities while also ensuring these efforts do not criminalize persons experiencing homelessness. Before issuing a citation, attempts should be made to obtain each unsheltered person's voluntary compliance by providing outreach, linkage to homeless services, and by offering shelter to facilitate relocation.

Encampment response efforts should prevent the following prohibited activities:

(a) Unauthorized Structures

The unauthorized construction, placement, and maintenance on public property any semi-permanent structure, including but not limited to:

- Hand-built sheds, or
- Structures with metal, plastic, wood, or other rigid materials used to create shelter.

(b) Unauthorized Camping on Public Property

Unauthorized camping on public property including but not limited to the use or placement of tents, tarps, sleeping bags, blankets, cardboard, or other materials used for shelter or sleeping.

(c) Unauthorized Camping Near Posted Clearance Notices

Unauthorized camping within 200 feet of a posted notice to vacate, or within any area with official signage designating the site for clearance or prohibiting camping, sitting, sleeping, lying, or storage of personal belongings.

(d) Impeding Public Right-of-Way

Sitting, sleeping, lying, or camping on public streets, sidewalks, bike paths, or roadways in a manner that impedes ADA-compliant passage or access to public infrastructure.

Section 3. Handling of Personal Belongings

During enforcement, items should be handled as follows:

(a) Items to Be Collected and Stored (for at least 60 days)

Personal belongings not posing a health or safety hazard should be:

- Tagged and stored for a minimum of 60 days with instructions posted regarding recovery.
- Personal belongings may include, but are not limited to, eyeglasses, IDs, medical devices, personal papers, legal documents, tents, backpacks, bicycles, strollers, and other personal items.

(b) Items to Be Immediately Disposed Of (due to health or safety risk)

Items that may be immediately discarded include:

1. Biohazardous or infested items (e.g., moldy bedding, soiled clothing, items contaminated by waste or sharps).
 2. Combustible or hazardous materials, including propane, gasoline, corrosives.
 3. Contraband or illegal substances, to be handled in accordance with law enforcement protocols.
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Section 4. Circumstances Requiring Immediate Action

In circumstances presenting risk of harm to life, health, safety, or infrastructure, the following action should be taken:

- Verbal notice to immediately vacate the area should be provided at the earliest opportunity in an effort to obtain voluntary compliance.
 - To the extent reasonably possible under the circumstances, any personal property that is left behind should be retained and stored, with notice regarding:
 - Where and how to retrieve stored belongings.
 - A contact number and location for property pickup.
 - The deadline for claim (minimum 60 days).
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Section 5. Regulations and Implementation

The jurisdiction should:

- Develop written policies and procedures consistent with this policy.
 - Ensure enforcement is coordinated with outreach teams, health professionals, behavioral health and social service providers for a bridge to housing or shelter.
 - Provide training for enforcement and outreach staff on trauma-informed care, disability rights, and de-escalation techniques.
 - Track data to monitor the number of people engaged, placed into shelter, or connected to housing. The County of Ventura has a GIS Mapping Application for use by law enforcement in jurisdictions to result in a comprehensive view of encampment response. The Ventura County CoC recommends that all outreach providers utilize VC HMIS for data collection, participation in the coordinated entry system, and referrals to resources.
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Section 6. Coordination and Reporting

- The Ventura County Task Force on Homelessness in partnership with Ventura County Continuum of Care should coordinate interagency and cross-jurisdictional meetings to review progress on addressing unsheltered homelessness and report publicly on outcomes.
- Reports should include (to the extent such data is available):
 - Number and location of encampments addressed.
 - Number of people offered and accepted shelter or services.
 - Number of housing placements resulting from encampment engagement.