

Subject: Encampments & Cleanups Procedure	Applicable To: DHS Street Homelessness Solutions Division and Street Outreach Providers	Effective Date: August 12, 2022
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Replaces: Procedure 17-400

I. PURPOSE

DHS’ abiding principle is to prioritize the safety and well-being of its clients and unsheltered individuals in New York City by building trust and meeting people where they are. DHS considers all individual needs when helping unsheltered people connect to social services and temporary emergency housing.

This procedure documents the strategy developed by the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and its partner City agencies to accomplish two goals:

- (1) Assess and provide compassionate, resource-intensive outreach** to help unsheltered people access social services such as temporary housing, financial assistance, or mental health and substance use assistance; and
- (2) Clear temporary physical structures** (such as encampments, tents, cars, cardboard boxes, etc.) in public spaces not meant for human habitation.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. Encampment – A fixed or temporary physical structure built or erected as a shelter or dwelling in an area not meant for human habitation such as areas lacking access to sanitation services, water, trash removal, etc.

B. Hotspot – Areas not meant for human habitation where groups of people experiencing street homelessness gather regularly.

C. Pop-Up – Areas not meant for human habitation where individuals and groups regularly sleep but which lack fixed comforts (e.g., furniture, standing structures, curtains, or mattresses).

D. Cleanup - A multi-Agency operation to provide people experiencing street homelessness with access to social services, housing, and other assistance while addressing street conditions that have become illegal, unsanitary, or unsafe.

E. Emergency cleanup - A cleanup conducted without notice or with minimal prior notice due to conditions posing a potential health and safety risk to site occupants or the general public.

III. INTRODUCTION

Unsheltered people in New York City may choose a variety of places to live, gather or camp. Historically, there have been several dozen homeless encampments and hotspots in a variety of locations across the city. Some of these locations are chosen for their seclusion, while others are in the center of busy urban life. People may gather in groups of 3-5, or occasionally as many as 15-20 people may seek refuge in the same place.

An encampment may include characteristics such as the presence of temporary structures used for shelter, multiple people experiencing street homelessness gathering at the location with their personal belongings, or continuous use of a location not meant for human habitation. Some encampment locations are seasonal, while others remain active throughout the year. People living in encampments may use different items to sleep such as cardboard, tents, and cars. Others may have mattresses or other furniture, or tap into nearby power supplies for electricity.

DHS' role is to connect people experiencing street homelessness to social services and to help them access emergency shelter and permanent housing. DHS communicates with other City agencies and monitors known hotspot activity to send outreach teams regularly to these locations. Among other things, a cleanup is performed to reduce the health and safety risks to people experiencing street homelessness posed by the accumulation of trash, debris, hazardous materials and other conditions of an unsanitary and verminous nature.

IV. PROCEDURE FOR HOTSPOTS, POP-UPS AND ENCAMPMENTS CLEANUP

A. Assessment

The DHS Joint Command Center (JCC) regularly receives requests to assess sites that may be considered hotspots, pop-ups, or encampments. These requests often come through 311, or they may be communicated directly to the JCC via various channels including email or telephone.

When the JCC receives a request to assess a site, it is assigned to an Outreach team of either DHS or provider partner staff. These teams canvass the sites, engage any individuals present regarding services available through DHS, take photos, and report findings back to the JCC Manager on Duty. The JCC then shares the results of canvassing with the New York City Police Department (NYPD), which makes a final determination regarding which sites will be assigned for cleanup.

Note: When possible, staff avoid taking photos of any undressed occupants.

If a site is determined to be an encampment, hotspot, or pop-up, the address or description of the site is documented. This information is used to allocate Outreach teams to the locations and to schedule a cleanup if needed.

Outreach teams may visit identified sites daily, dependent upon staffing availability.

B. Preparation for Cleanup

The JCC coordinates with other City agencies and individuals such as the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) and NYPD in advance of the cleanup, including the agency under whose jurisdiction the site falls (e.g., NYC Department of Parks and Recreation), the property owner (if applicable), or syringe disposal teams. This coordination may also include provider Outreach teams, especially when these teams have an existing relationship with anyone at the site, or the team is well-known in the area.

Emergency Cleanup:

An emergency cleanup is scheduled under the following circumstances:

- Presence of an onsite hazard (e.g., tapping power lines)
- Encampment exists in a high-traffic area
- Illegal, unsanitary, or unsafe structures present onsite
- Encampment located within a playground
- Syringes onsite
- Service request made by Commissioner-level city official or above

Emergency cleanups are scheduled the same day the service request is received by JCC.

Under this expedited process, the JCC does not provide advance notice by posting written notices at the site. However, the Manager on Duty does assign an Outreach team to visit the site in advance of the cleanup to engage any individuals present regarding services available through DHS. In all other ways, an emergency cleanup follows the same procedure as a standard cleanup.

Note: If the emergency categorization is due to the presence of syringes at the site, a special syringe removal team is brought in. This team may come from DSNY, or in instances where the syringes are located in areas outside their jurisdiction, from other organizations partnering with DHS.

Standard Cleanup:

The JCC Cleaning Liaison schedules dates for cleaning, with intent to give enough time for outreach teams to visit the site and offer shelter and services. Typically, the cleanup takes place 48-96 hours from the scheduling date. Before the cleanup date, Outreach teams visit the location to offer services and shelter to anyone present and to issue and post notices as indicated in the section below. They also inform clients of their options and answer any questions about the cleanup process.

C. Notices

When site assessment and cleanup scheduling are complete, outreach teams visit the site to distribute copies of the Notice of New York City Cleanup (**DHS-46**) ("Notice") to anyone present at the site. Staff use this as an opportunity to engage any site occupants. The outreach team also posts copies of the Notice in locations that are clearly visible to the site occupants and general public. Notices are posted with both the front and rear side of the page visible to make it easier for occupants to access notices in their preferred language, if needed.

Outreach teams also communicate the information on the Notice verbally to anyone present at the site each time they visit and on the date of the scheduled cleanup.

D. Property Safeguarding and Vouchering

When the City conducts a site cleanup, DHS must exercise best efforts to safeguard and voucher eligible personal property for temporary storage using the information presented in this section.

During the cleanup, if people are present at the site and are unable to safely carry their personal property with them as they leave the site, outreach teams must provide information about safeguarding and vouchering their personal property.

I. Process – Identifying and Storing Eligible Property

DHS must provide free temporary storage for eligible property for at least 90 days upon request of an occupant, unless the item is not safe to store or not transportable. Eligible and ineligible property are defined in *Section IV. Definition of Eligible Property*.

Where practical, DHS must photograph and label eligible property that it will safeguard prior to storage. After 90 days, DHS will dispose of the property.

DHS will direct DSNY to discard any property identified as ineligible during the cleanup. The process for storing eligible property and disposing of ineligible property varies depending on if the occupant is present onsite at the time of the cleanup:

Site Occupants Present: During the cleanup, DHS will provide individuals with a reasonable opportunity to leave the immediate area and take their property with them. Thereafter, DHS Outreach teams must ask remaining occupants with property in the immediate area if they would like DHS to store their eligible property temporarily and provide information about how to apply for a storage grant with the Human Resources Administration.

DHS will complete and provide a **Voucher** to occupants that elect to store their eligible property with DHS. The Voucher contains:

- The occupant's name, if the occupant is willing to provide it
- The date and location of the cleanup
- A description of the eligible property stored and any additional details describing the specific location where the eligible item(s) being stored were located within the site prior to retrieval
- The date by which the occupant must retrieve their eligible property and a clear explanation that after this date, DHS will dispose of their eligible property without further notice
- The name, address, and contact information of the facility where the property will be stored

Site Occupants Not Present: DHS will make reasonable efforts to identify readily apparent eligible property of occupants that are not present at the time of the cleanup and store any such property for up to 90 days.

Reasonable efforts shall not include opening sealed, opaque, or locked containers. If DHS staff identify a large quantity of documents, they are not required to individually review each document. DHS staff must presumptively treat documents as eligible property unless ineligible as defined in *Section IV. Definition of Eligible Property*.

II. Post Cleanup

Immediately after the cleanup, DHS outreach teams must post a notice (“Post Cleanup Notice”) informing occupants that were not present during the cleanup where they may retrieve any eligible property that DHS has stored on their behalf. The Post Cleanup Notice must contain the date that DHS will dispose of any unclaimed property.

DHS Outreach teams must be present in the immediate area during the cleanup to explain how to access transportation to the temporary storage location and how to apply for a storage grant with the Human Resources Administration.

III. Retrieval of personal property

When a site occupant attempts to retrieve eligible property, DHS will request information from the person necessary to associate the person with their property.

DHS will release property to individuals who are able to provide information/details to accurately identify their property for release. Individuals may submit their name, show their voucher, or provide their voucher number.

In the event someone claims they were not present at the time of cleanup and thus, did not receive a voucher or lost their voucher, they must describe their property, the date or reasonable timeframe when the property was collected, and description of location where the property was collected. DHS will release property to individuals who can provide those details sufficient to show that the property belongs to them.

IV. Definition of Eligible Property

Eligible Property:

- Personally identifiable papers and documents such as photographic identification (e.g. passports, driver’s licenses), government-issued documents, birth certificates, bank statements, social security cards
- Prescribed medication bearing an occupant’s name
- Jewelry or eyeglasses
- Medical equipment, such as walkers, crutches, wheelchairs, or other personal mobility equipment that is not clearly identified as property of a healthcare facility
- Backpacks, suitcases
- Functional electronics, like a mobile phone, tablet, or laptop
- Tents if they are functional, collapsible, or able to be disassembled, subject to the requirement that all eligible property must be transportable
- A functional bicycle, so long as it is not readily identifiable as property the City has an interest in (e.g. Citibike)

- Any other item of reasonable value that is safe to store and transportable that an occupant asks the City to store during the cleanup, unless the item is ineligible as defined below

Ineligible Property

- Live animals that are not claimed by an occupant – DHS outreach/DSNY/NYPD will contact Animal Care and Control to retrieve any live animals whose owner is not present during the cleanup
- Weapons or explosives
- Any item that is deemed illegal under New York City, State, or federal law
- Visibly contaminated property (evidence of pest infestation, mold, human or animal waste)
- Non-medical foods or liquids of any kind, perishable or otherwise
- Furniture
- Mattresses
- Shopping carts
- Tents that cannot be collapsed
- Equipment or devices readily identifiable as property of healthcare facility or in which the City has a property interest
- Any property deemed unsafe to store, or not transportable, even if it has reasonable value
- Storage of locked or sealed containers will be left to the agency's discretion to safeguard.

E. Cleanup Process

At the time of the cleanup, all involved agencies meet near the site and approach the site together. When there are people present at the site, the outreach team offers services and shelter and explains the cleanup process. They notify anyone present at the site to retain their important documents and any items of value. For examples, see section D-IV, above. They also notify site occupants to leave the site with any items they choose to keep and inform them that any remaining items will be subject to disposal.

DSNY does not engage with the site occupants. Once the site occupants are not present at the cleanup site, DSNY begins the cleanup and disposes of any items left behind. Outreach teams make every effort to provide information on how property can be safeguarded and/or vouchered (See "Notices," above).

F. Hotspot, Pop-Up, or Encampment closure

In addition to cleaning the site, work is often done to prevent re-habitation of the Hotspot, Pop-Up or Encampment site. Outreach teams conduct resource-intensive outreach to help site occupants obtain access to temporary housing and other supportive social services.

Sites may be subjected to preventive measures taken by authorized entities such as a property owner or responsible City agency. For example, fencing or other measures may be used to close the site, making it inaccessible for habitation. The property owner or agency may also post “no trespassing” signs at the location.

Outreach teams may return to the site post-cleanup to offer services to any people that return to the site.

G. Close-Out

After the cleanup operation, outreach teams submit a summary report to the Manager on Duty via email. This report includes:

- Who participated
- What actions were taken
- Where and when the cleanup took place
- Any issues that arose (Specify examples)
- Record the number of people connected to temporary housing
- Collect information for people connected to social services

V. ATTACHMENTS/RELATED DOCUMENTS

Attachments:

Notice of New York City Clean Up ([DHS-46](#))

Related Documents:

[Joint Command Center \(JCC\) Best Practices Guide](#)

[Joint Command Center \(JCC\) Process Narratives and Workflows](#)

DATE: _____

NOTICE OF NEW YORK CITY CLEAN UP

LOCATION: _____



Beginning _____, the NYC Department of Sanitation, and/or other New York City agencies, will complete a clean-up of this location. As of the date of the clean-up, you must remove your belongings from this location. If you are not present during the clean-up any items remaining at the location may be removed. DHS Outreach Teams will be available to assist you with services to come inside so that you do not have to remain on the streets. We will be back at this location in 24 hours or more.

If you would like access to DHS shelter services instead of the special help DHS Outreach Teams can provide, you can contact 311 or report to the appropriate shelter intake facility for

- Single Men and Adult Families: **400-430 East 30th Street, New York, NY 10016;**
- Single Women: **116 William Street, Brooklyn, NY 11207; or, 1122 Franklin Avenue, Bronx, NY 10456**

Some items, such as furniture, appliances, and large televisions, are not permitted in shelters because of space limitations and must be placed in storage, but we can help you with a storage grant. If you have an active Cash Assistance case, you can request a special storage grant on ACCESS HRA (www.nyc.gov/accesshra) or go into one of the open Cash Assistance Job Centers which are listed on <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/locations/job-locations-and-service-centers.page>. Even if you do not have a Cash Assistance case, you can apply for an emergency grant on ACCESS HRA (www.nyc.gov/accesshra) or you can go to an open Cash Assistance Job Center. You will need to provide a list of items you are or will be storing and a bill if you have one. An open and active Cash Assistance case is not required to be eligible for storage funds. Please redeem recyclable bottles and cans in advance of the clean-up.

If you have any questions regarding this New York City clean-up and the special help that we can provide to you to come inside, please speak to an Outreach worker, or contact the DHS Street Homeless Solutions Unit by:

	PHONE:
	EMAIL:

or contact **311** by phone or app.