



California
Interagency Council
on Homelessness

GUIDANCE: ADDRESSING ENCAMPMENTS

The State of California encourages local jurisdictions to continue to employ person-centered, Housing First, and trauma-informed approaches when addressing the needs of persons living in encampments on public property. These evidence-based practices ensure services are strategically coordinated and deployed prior to any enforcement effort and ensure the best possible outcomes for all involved.

Before removing an encampment on public property, Cal ICH recommends that a local government:

- ✓ Is actively aware of interim housing capacity, including congregate and non-congregate shelter (i.e. motel vouchers), that is **immediately available** to serve persons in the encampment in question.
- ✓ Has a clear policy for the handling and storage of unattended personal belongings of persons in encampments.
- ✓ Provides as much advance notice of a removal action as possible. Cal ICH recommends a **minimum of 48 hours notice**, unless imminent threats to life, health, safety, or infrastructure require a shorter notice period, to persons living in the encampment and to any service provider actively serving and/or engaging with the encampment in question. Cal ICH recommends that the notice include:
 - The anticipated date and time of the removal action.
 - Information on services, including shelter, that are immediately available to persons living in the encampment.
 - Information on how unattended belongings will be handled the day of the removal action, including what will be stored and how they can be recovered.

Cal ICH further recommends that local governments are **actively aware of and engaging with current local projects and/or efforts** (i.e. Encampment Resolution Funds) serving the encampment in question and encampments in general.

Cal ICH encourages local governments to make every effort to **identify and offer shelter** to persons living in an encampment in advance of taking action to remove an encampment. If shelter cannot be secured prior to removal despite these efforts, it's recommended that a local government ensure that there are reasonably accessible locations within the jurisdiction where a person may lawfully sleep.

Where an encampment presents specific safety hazards, it may be appropriate for a local government to remediate those hazards prior to or independent of a removal operation, for example addressing tapped electrical wires, removing dangerous items including apparatuses involving open flames, weapons, and controlled substances, or dismantling or removing structures within an encampment that pose a specific hazard.

On May 12, 2025, Governor Newsom released a Model Encampment Ordinance for communities to use as a framework to address encampments with urgency and dignity. The Model Encampment Ordinance references this Cal ICH Guidance to Addressing Encampments, which has been updated as of May 20, 2025, to expand on and offer clarification to important points within the Model Encampment Ordinance.

THE GOVERNOR'S MODEL ORDINANCE: THOUGHTFUL IMPLEMENTATION MATTERS

Q. If they can't sleep "here", where can they sleep?

A. The Model Encampment Ordinance underscores a basic principle: **enforcement must be paired with shelter**. But asking someone to move without a real alternative only shifts the crisis. **Local governments must plan ahead—identifying safe, accessible, and legal places to go before any encampment action occurs.** This may include indoor shelter or, when necessary, designated safe camping areas.

Cal ICH supports communities in aligning enforcement with housing solutions—so people aren't just moved, they're supported.

Q. What is a reasonable offer of shelter?

A. All shelter beds are not the same. A reasonable offer **meets a person's individual needs**:

- A private room for a trauma survivor
- ADA access for someone using a wheelchair
- A place where partners and children are welcome

Reasonable offers increase the likelihood of acceptance and lead to better outcomes.

Cal ICH encourages local teams to lead with dignity, ensuring every offer is made with thoughtfulness and care.

Q. What meaningful services should be included on the notice?

A. Posting notice is more than a legal requirement, it's an opportunity to connect. Notices should include:

- ✓ How to access shelter and services
- ✗ Avoid long, generic resource lists with no connection to available support

Notices are most effective when they offer timely, real options for immediately available shelter.

Q. What items should be stored?

A. People's belongings are often **all they have**. Treat them that way. Use the "mom test": If your mom owned it, would you want it saved? This includes:

- ID cards, prescriptions, glasses
- Photos, documents, mobility aids

Hazardous or illegal items should be handled separately, but most items deserve secure, respectful storage.

Q. Who should be onsite for enforcement actions?

A. Who's present matters. When outreach teams, housing navigators, and service providers are part of the process, trust builds and outcomes improve. **Enforcement should be a bridge to housing—not a barrier.**

Are you a city or county in need of support developing or implementing a local ordinance?
Cal ICH is here to help communities implement humane, housing-focused strategies. Contact us at
caliche@bcsh.ca.gov.