



## **FAQ: Unauthorized Camping on Public Property in the City of Spokane**

### **Unauthorized camping response and COVID-19**

*Please keep these temporary conditions in mind in regard to illegal camping impact mitigation.*

- COVID-19 has impacted the City's ability to mitigate the impacts of illegal encampments. City of Spokane staff's ability to respond is simply not the same as it was before March 2020.
- Code enforcement, Spokane Police and Community Court have had to adapt to these temporary conditions with a different set of safety measures and resources.
- Reports continue to be taken, the locations are scouted and staff response is dependent on each situation. For example, is the camp occupied or abandoned? If it is abandoned, often times the City will send in a litter crew to clean up waste after posting written notice for no less than 48 hours. In the past, Geiger Correctional work crews have been utilized to aid in camp abatements. This resource is currently unavailable under health safety guidelines.
- Additionally, Community Court (a resource that provides social services for those who are cited) has been impacted. People have not been receiving the same level of assistance to help provide stabilization and solutions.
- Your patience is appreciated as the City continues to adjust operations to respond to illegal camping reports under these guidelines while navigating ongoing impacts of the pandemic.

### ***What is unauthorized camping on public property in the City of Spokane?***

The definition of camping, in the context of *Unauthorized Camping on Public Property*, comes from Spokane Municipal Code 12.02.1002. In this section the below definition is provided for "camp" or "camping."

*"Camp" or "camping" shall mean residing on or using public property for living accommodation purposes, as exemplified by remaining for prolonged or repetitious periods of time not associated with ordinary use of such public property with one's personal possessions (including but not limited to clothing, sleeping bags, bedrolls, blankets, sheets, cots, tarpaulins, hammocks, luggage, backpacks, kitchen utensils, cookware, or similar material), sleeping or making preparations to sleep, storing personal belongings as above defined, regularly cooking or consuming meals.*

There is a related code section that prohibits camping on public property, [SMC 12.02.1010](#). Unauthorized camping can also implicate a number of other code sections; including but not limited to the following:

- Litter & Rubbish ([SMC 10.08.010](#))
- Sitting, Lying on Sidewalk in a Designated Zone ([SMC 10.10.026](#))
- General Nuisance Declaration ([SMC 12.08.0208](#))
- Obstruction of the Public Right of Way ([SMC 12.02.0737](#))
- Unlawful Disposal of Litter on Public Property ([SMC 12.02.1008](#))

### ***How do I report unauthorized camping on public property?***

Report an encampment on public property by calling 311 or (509) 755-7489. You can also make a report [online](#). Any potential criminal activity should be reported to Crime Check or 911 as well, depending on the activity.

### ***What happens once an encampment is reported?***

When an encampment is reported, pertinent information (location, camp description and condition, etc.) is entered into a software system. City staff uses this information to, most importantly, notify outreach providers of the camp. City staff then attempts to locate the camp to evaluate occupancy status and cleanup and enforcement needs. Staff updates the software system record with documentation of the camp and any actions taken.

### ***How does the City respond to an encampment?***

The first objective of response is to connect people with services on their own volition. The typical response to a camp consists of a team of people, including Spokane Police Neighborhood Resource Officers, Code Enforcement Litter Crew staff members, and outreach and service providers. Each report is investigated by city staff and outreach partners are notified of each report that is received. Upon the initial visit to the camp, the condition and occupancy status of the camp is assessed. Often, upon the initial visit, sites have been vacated and only trash and debris has been left behind. In these situations, the sites are cleaned up and the report is closed. If the sites remain active, information is provided to occupants about services that are provided by outreach partners in our community. For occupied sites, verbal notice may be provided to occupants to gather their belongings and leave the area. For sites that are still active camps but unoccupied at the time of visit, written notice to vacate may be posted. If verbal or written notice is provided, city staff returns to the site following the expiration of the notice timeframe. The City also responds in a pro-active and routine manner to various chronic camping, illegal dumping, and vehicle habitation locations to mitigate adverse impacts of these activities.

Enforcement of the Spokane Municipal Code by the Spokane Police Department may also be a part of the City's response to an encampment.

### ***What is the process for responding to an encampment?***

Occupants at camps are notified of available resources in our community. They are notified of current shelter availability and shelter locations. They are also provided with information about other applicable services if needs are disclosed. Attempts are made to contact specific case workers for occupants if that information is known to notify service providers of the occupant's location and request assistance for various services that address basic health needs. Often times, City staff offers trash bags and works with occupants to separate solid waste from belongings and other items that the occupant wishes to keep.

### ***What happens to the belongings of those people when an encampment is abated?***

At the vast majority of unauthorized encampments, occupants take their belongings with them prior to abatement. City staff provide notice and a reasonable amount of time for occupants to gather their belongings and leave the area. In these cases the abatement consists solely of solid waste and discarded items. In the event that a person is not present when an encampment is visited, notice is posted at the location and a timeframe is provided to remove property. If unclaimed items remain upon return, city staff evaluate the items that remain at that site in accordance with current City of Spokane [Encampment Removal and Cleanup policy](#). If items remain that qualify for storage, these items are transported from the camp to a temporary storage location at a city facility. Notice is left at the site that property was removed and stored at another location and information is provided to facilitate retrieval of these items.

### ***If an occupant receives an illegal camping citation, what does that mean?***

Occupants who receive citations are referred to [City of Spokane Municipal Court's Community Court program](#). This is a comprehensive program consisting of various rehabilitative services, such as behavioral health counseling, housing, healthcare, education, employment, etc. that will help improve quality of life for participants, their loved ones, and the society at large. Community courts assist participants in achieving self-sufficiency and becoming responsible members of

the community. The community service projects put specific emphasis on environmental improvements and neighborhood revitalization.

***Who pays for the debris and garbage left behind?***

The Code Enforcement litter crew is tasked with removing debris and solid waste left behind at camps. This team also transports debris to appropriate disposal facilities and transports eligible belongings to a storage location for retrieval by the owner. These costs are a part of the Code Enforcement budget.

***Can I make a report for concerning camping on private property?***

Encampments on private property are address in Spokane Municipal Code under Regulation of Activities. [SMC 10.08C.080](#)