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# Homelessness, Camping and Outside Habitation

## 461.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that personnel understand the needs and rights of the homeless and to establish procedures to guide officers during all contacts with the unsheltered and homeless community, whether consensual or for enforcement purposes.

The Vancouver Police Department recognizes that members of the homeless community are often in need of special protection and services. The Vancouver Police Department will address these needs in balance with the overall mission of this Department.

### 461.1.1 POLICY

It is the policy of the Vancouver Police Department to provide appropriate law enforcement services to all members of the community including those who are unsheltered or experiencing homelessness.

The Department recognizes procedures for interacting with people who are unsheltered or experiencing homelessness may change over time due to many factors. Responsibility is placed on the HART Officer and District 1 Lieutenant to maintain a current Homelessness, Camping & Outside Habitation Procedure Manual for use by Department personnel. The procedures in this Manual should be followed by employees with any exceptions based on articulable reasons and supervisory approval, if feasible.

[Homeless and Outdoor Habitation Procedures Manual](#)

## 461.2 FIELD CONTACTS AND OFFICER RESPONSE

Officers will respond to calls for assistance, act as a deterrent to crime, enforce state and local laws, and respond to emergencies 24 hours per day, seven days a week from or about people experiencing homelessness and take appropriate police action.

## 461.3 HOMELESS ASSISTANCE & RESOURCES TEAM (HART) OFFICER

HART is a City resource, managed by the City of Vancouver Homeless Response Manager, with a VPD officer assigned to the team. The responsibilities of the HART Officer include the following, but not limited to:

- (a) Maintain and make available to all Department employees a list of assistance programs and other resources that are available to people experiencing homelessness.
- (b) Coordinate with Social Services and representatives of other organizations that provide assistance and support to people experiencing homelessness.
- (c) Provide regular outreach and engagement services to encampments and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and connect individuals with needed stabilizing/supportive services through outside service providers and nonprofits.

# Vancouver Police Department

Vancouver PD Policy Manual

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- (d) Remain knowledgeable of current laws and City policies regarding outdoor habitation and dealing with the removal and/or destruction of the personal property of people experiencing homelessness.
- (e) Provide notice to people living in encampments of planned encampment clean-up and/or removal operations
- (f) In conjunction with other HART members, coordinate, and be present during, any encampment clean-up or removal operation.
- (g) Monitor, and respond to, HART related communications.

### **461.3.1 INVESTIGATIVE CONSIDERATIONS**

Homeless members of the community will receive the same level and quality of service provided to other members of the community. The fact that a victim or witness is homeless can, however, require special considerations for a successful investigation and prosecution. Personnel should consider the following when handling investigations involving homeless victims, witnesses or suspects:

- (a) Document alternate contact information. This may include obtaining addresses and phone numbers of relatives and friends.
- (b) Document places the homeless person may frequent.
- (c) Provide homeless victims with victim/witness resources when appropriate.
- (d) Obtain statements from all available witnesses in the event a homeless victim is unavailable for a court appearance.
- (e) Consider whether the person may be a vulnerable adult.
- (f) Arrange for transportation for investigation-related matters.
- (g) Consider whether a crime should be reported and submitted for prosecution even when a homeless victim indicates he/she does not desire prosecution.
- (h) Document any facts indicating that the offense was intentionally committed because the victim was homeless or perceived to be homeless.

### **461.4 TRAINING**

Officers will receive regular training on applicable current laws, City policies and Department Procedures regarding outdoor habitation, and how to appropriately handle the removal and/or destruction of the personal property of people experiencing homelessness.