

GENERAL ORDER



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Title

**Provisions for Homeless Persons
During Periods of Cold Weather**

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Distribution

A

Replaces / Rescinds

General Order 204.07 (Provisions for Homeless
Persons During Periods of Cold Weather)

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I. Background

There are a significant number of persons in the District of Columbia who are homeless and in need of assistance from both community-based and government-sponsored programs. In many cases, police officers are the first to encounter homeless persons living on the street, either by finding them on patrol or responding to a citizen report. Periods of extreme weather present special hazards for homeless persons, especially when the temperature outdoors is very cold. Therefore, it is imperative that all members familiarize themselves with the provisions and services available to homeless persons so that the appropriate referrals can be made.

II. Policy

The policy of the Metropolitan Police Department is to assist persons in need of shelter during periods of cold and adverse weather. Particularly, the Department shall coordinate with appropriate District of Columbia Government agencies in following the Mayor's Winter Plan, which establishes hypothermia procedures designed to deal with the needs of the homeless during extremely cold weather.

III. Definitions

- A. When used in this directive, the following terms shall have the designated meaning:
1. Hypothermia - subnormal temperature of the body.

2. Hypothermia Prevention Program - a program designed to address the needs of the city's homeless population through the winter months, while still respecting their civil rights.
3. Hypothermia Hotline (202-399-7093) - hotline staffed by the United Planning Organization (UPO), or its successor as a contractor, twenty-four hours a day, from November 1 through March 31. Personnel who staff the Hypothermia Hotline will also provide at least four vans throughout the city to assist homeless persons and respond to calls from members when the Hypothermia Alert is in force.
4. Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP) - located within the Department of Mental Health, made up of personnel trained and certified to make on-site evaluations of homeless persons and to take such persons into custody for mental observation and/or evaluation if there is evidence of mental incompetence.
5. Emergency Management Agency (EMA) - agency responsible for the mobilization of all outreach workers in the District of Columbia, to include: Department of Human Services, Family Services Administration (DHS/FSA), Department of Health (DOH), and Department of Mental Health (DMH), that provide assistance to vulnerable people on the streets.

IV. Regulations

- A. The District of Columbia Department of Human Services (DHS), with the full support of the Metropolitan Police Department, has instituted a program designed to address the needs of the homeless population during periods of cold weather.
- B. The provisions of this order and the Hypothermia Prevention Program shall go into effect whenever the National Weather Service forecasts a temperature of thirty-two degrees (32°) Fahrenheit or below; or when the wind chill factor is 32° or below. The program may also be put into effect under other adverse weather conditions.
- C. A representative from the Emergency Management Agency (EMA) shall notify the Watch Commander, Communications Division, prior to 1300 hours when the Hypothermia Alert is put in effect.
- D. When an alert is announced, provisions of this order shall take effect at 1900 hours and shall remain in effect until 0700 hours the following morning, unless the temperature and/or wind chill remains 32° Fahrenheit or below.

- E. DHS will assign its personnel to operate vans on a twenty-four hour basis throughout the District of Columbia. They will attempt to locate homeless persons in need of shelter and other assistance, as well as assist members who locate persons who are without adequate shelter during cold weather.

V. Procedural Guidelines

- A. Members on patrol shall:
 - 1. Be on the alert for persons who are without adequate shelter during periods of cold weather.
 - 2. Upon coming into contact with a homeless person, determine if an individual is suffering from or is at risk of hypothermia. Members shall look for the following symptoms:
 - a. Shivering or trembling,
 - b. Skin discolorization,
 - c. Loss of bladder control,
 - d. Confusion or forgetfulness,
 - e. Slurred speech/difficulty walking,
 - f. Sleepiness, hard to wake up,
 - g. Bizarre behavior (removing clothing, etc.),
 - h. Slow or erratic breathing,
 - i. Weak pulse, or
 - j. Loss of consciousness.
 - 3. If the person requires emergency medical assistance, (i.e. unconscious, comatose, injured, etc.):
 - a. Request the services of an ambulance.
(CALEA 26.1.1/41.2.5/81.2.5-a)
 - b. Remain on the scene with the homeless person until an ambulance arrives.
 - c. Prepare the necessary report(s) and make the proper notification(s) in accordance with established procedures.
 - 4. If the person does not require emergency medical assistance; members shall:

- a. Contact the Communications Division and request that the dispatcher contact the 24-Hour Shelter Hotline to arrange a van from the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP) be summoned to the scene. (CALEA 41.2.5 / 81.2.5-a)
 - b. Indicate to the dispatcher that there is no need for emergency medical assistance.
 - c. Provide a description of the person, along with his/her name, if available, and location to the dispatcher.
 - d. Not remain on the scene awaiting the arrival of a van, unless circumstances dictate that the member's presence is required.
5. Be mindful that the D.C. Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill Act (D.C. Official Code § 21-521), and Rehabilitation of Alcoholics, District of Columbia (D.C. Official Code § 24-604) compels certain persons who are homeless and vulnerable to move from the streets into safe facilities. If a person requires services pursuant to these acts, a member shall transport him or her to an emergency or non-emergency medical facility for appropriate crisis intervention, medical assistance or other supportive services. Members shall notify the Synchronized Operations Command Center (SOCC) of all transports as they pertain to hypothermia conditions.
6. Handle intoxicated persons in accordance with the provision of GO-PCA-501.03 (Handling Intoxicated Persons). Members shall be mindful that a person's judgment can become clouded when under the influence of alcohol, thereby preventing that individual from making a sound decision on how to protect him/herself from the cold. When a person consumes a lot of alcohol, the alcohol causes blood vessels to dilate and blood to flow away from the core of the body, which can cause body temperature to drop, thereby causing the person to have a false sense of feeling warm.
7. Handle suspected mentally ill persons consistent with GO-OPS-308.04 (Processing of Persons Who May Suffer From Mental Illness). In addition, members shall look for signs indicating mental illness, including inability to think rationally, inability to exercise control over behavior, or the inability to take reasonable care of one's personal welfare.

- B. Assisting Personnel of the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP)
1. Members responding to assist CPEP shall transport the homeless person to an emergency or non-emergency medical facility for appropriate crisis intervention, medical assessment, or other supportive services. If the homeless person is medically cleared and stabilized and if the person has been diagnosed as chemically dependent and requiring medical detoxification, the member shall transport the homeless person to the DOH/Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration (APRA) Medical Detoxification Unit. (CALEA 71.3.2)
 2. Upon being dispatched to assist CPEP, members shall collaborate with outreach workers to ensure that the FD-12 (Application for Emergency Hospitalization by a Physician or Psychologist of the Person, Officer or Agent of D.C. Department of Human Service or an Officer to Make Arrests), and emergency psychiatric assessment process are appropriately applied to ensure that the vulnerable homeless person is removed from the streets during severe weather conditions. (CALEA 71.3.2)
- C. Supervisory Personnel shall:
1. Ensure that members are made aware of any Hypothermia Alert during roll call for the evening and midnight tours of duty within the Office of Operational Services and Communications Division. (CALEA 41.1.3)
 2. Ensure that members notify Emergency Management Agency (EMA) of all non-homicide deaths that occur on public streets, during the hypothermia alerts.
 3. Ensure that members notify the Synchronized Operations Command Center (SOCC) of all transports as they pertain to hypothermia conditions and symptoms.
- F. The Director, Communications Division, shall:
1. Ensure that an announcement concerning a declared Hypothermia Alert is broadcast during the evening and midnight tours of duty, and the daywork tour of duty if the alert is still in effect;
 2. Ensure that the Hypothermia Alert is issued by Teletype; and

3. Direct dispatchers to notify the Hypothermia Hotline upon receiving requests for assistance of a van from members on patrol.

VI. References

GO-OPS-308.04 (Processing of Suspected Mentally Ill Persons)

GO-PCA-501.03 (Handling Intoxicated Persons)

TB-01-02 (Hypothermia Guidelines)

// SIGNED //
Charles H. Ramsey
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