



# Management Response: Emergency Shelters for Dangerous Temperatures

# Shelter Types



Two primary shelter types that exist currently:

- Cold Weather Shelters (CWS): CWSs primarily serve unhoused individuals and are considered planned activities that have set parameters to determine when they are opened. Similarly, a Cooling Center is a hot weather respite, not an overnight shelter, generally open during the hottest times of the day at Austin Public Libraries or Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) recreation centers.
- Emergency Disasters Shelters (EDS). Emergency Disaster Shelters serve those who are unable to return to their homes due to unplanned, widespread emergency situations and undetermined duration of emergency conditions.

# Recommendations & Management Response



Recommendation: To ensure the City's cold weather shelter operations are effectively managed:

a. Assign the overall ownership of the City's cold weather shelter activities.

Response: Austin Public Health (APH) has ownership of Cold Weather Shelters (CWS) because CWSs have the primary purpose of protecting the unsheltered homeless and are primarily used by people experiencing homelessness during extreme cold weather conditions. Proposed Implementation Date: December 2022

b. Clarify and communicate the roles and responsibilities of each group/entity involved in the City's cold weather shelter activities.

Response: CWS roles and responsibilities will be established, defined, and assigned with clear triggers and activation information. The CWS plan will include City staff required to activate and run a CWS, as well as options for community partners/contractors to supplement a CWS to ensure a clear and transparent process. Council authorized APH to negotiate and execute an agreement for \$1.2 million with a contractor to operate CWSs. The City will rely on PARD facilities with hybrid City staff and contract vendor support to operate CWSs during the early part of 2023. Once contractor begins, evaluation will be needed to determine if the funding and contract scope are properly aligned with programmatic goals to include fully outsourcing services to a turn-key vendor.

Proposed Implementation Date: February 2023



## Recommendations & Management Response

- c. Ensure City-operated shelters are adequately staffed and that staff are properly trained

Response: Several Key Department employees' staff CWSs while other Department employees volunteer to work at CWSs as needed. Staff at CWS should be individuals who have training or experience working with vulnerable populations, including people experiencing homelessness. Staff will continue to identify staff that meet minimum requirements as well as staff who are interested in supporting CWSs when the need arises. City volunteers and contractor staff will be receive training prior staffing CWSs.

Proposed Implementation Date: February 2023

- d. Ensure the City's shelter-related expenses are tracked.

Response: A reporting code has been established to help track staff time and other expenses when CWS are activated.

Proposed Implementation Date: Completed



## Recommendations & Management Response

e. Implement a monitoring and accountability process to ensure that cold weather shelters are consistently opened according to established weather conditions and events and that each group/ entity fulfills their assigned roles and responsibilities.

Response: For the upcoming cold weather season, CWS activations shall be determined primarily by APH, relying on data conveyed by HSEM from the National Weather Service (NWS). The NWS shall be the official weather resource, and the Camp Mabry weather station will be the official location used to determine CWS activations for people experiencing homelessness. In future years, the CWS vendor may be charged with tracking the weather forecast and activating CWS. APH, in coordination with HSEM and other partner departments, have already updated the CWS activation criteria to include considerations for wind chill factor. CWSs serving people experiencing homelessness are activated when the following overnight temperature thresholds are met:

- 32 degrees or below and dry
- 35 degrees or below and wet
- 35 degrees with a wind chill factor that drops the temperature to 32 degrees or lower

APH, in collaboration with HSEM, will maintain a record of when CWSs are operated.

Proposed Implementation Date: January 2023



## Recommendations & Management Response

Recommendation: In order to ensure that the City's Cold Weather Shelter Operations plan and the Special Operations Plan for Heat Emergencies reflect current expectations, operational resources, and roles and responsibilities; the director of the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management should work with applicable stakeholders to update the plans. At the minimum, the plans should:

- Reflect the various entities currently involved in the City's cold weather emergency shelter and heat emergencies operations and define their respective roles and responsibilities.
- Reflect the potential shelter facilities including their activation hierarchy.

Response: Concur

HSEM conducts annual reviews of the Cold Weather Shelter Plan by November and the Special Operations Plan for Heat Emergencies by May. The reviews occur annually, and HSEM recognizes improvements can be made to document that the review has been conducted. The Cold Weather Shelter Operations plan will be updated by October 2023 with clear roles and responsibilities for partner departments and supporting agencies, and factoring in the new vendor selected to provide CWS services.

The CWS plan will be updated with locations for potential shelter facilities to include an activation hierarchy that explains how and when each facility is activated. HSEM will maintain the plan and will collaborate with APH and other involved departments to conduct annual reviews. HSEM will update procedures to incorporate proper documentation of plan reviews and updates once the third-party Vendor contractor is onboarded.

Proposed Implementation Date: October 2023



## Recommendations & Management Response

Recommendation: To ensure that the City effectively provides necessary services in the cold weather shelters, the City Manager should determine which services will be provided to shelterees and have provisions for extenuating circumstances like power failures or extended lengths of stay.

Response: Concur

The CWS Plan will identify the services provided in CWSs and include provisions for circumstances that might extend the expected length of stays. Currently, CWSs are designed to provide basic services overnight – a place to sleep, access to toilets/ sinks (not showers), limited meals, and access to charge electronic devices, including certain medical equipment. These services could expand over time based on the vendor's future capabilities.

The City will convene a workgroup to establish protocols between stakeholder departments and community partners for scenarios involving extended lengths of stay and overflow contingencies. The City will assess the additional resources needed for such an event, including using emergency contracts and non-City resources to supplement what the City can provide.

All City facilities have continuity plans in the event of an emergency, like power failure, at their facility. For City facilities that may serve as a CWS, a gap analysis will be performed.

Staff will identify potential mitigation projects that will further harden City facilities to include incorporating the City's Climate Resilience and Adaptation Plan for City Assets and Operations and the City's Resilience Strategy, currently in development, to increase resilience in City-owned facilities and improve our ability to respond in an emergency

Proposed Implementation Date: October 2023

# Questions?

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