

Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations (COHHO)

April 22, 2013

2012-2013 Hypothermia Comments

To: Alex Y Lew, City Administrator
David A. Berns, Director, DHS
Fred Swan, Director of Family Services Administration, DHS
Chapman Todd, Chair, Operations & Logistics Committee,
DC Interagency Council on Homelessness
Councilmember Jim Graham, Chair, Committee on Human Services

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations (COHHO). COHHO is a diverse group of non-profit organizations and individuals in the District of Columbia who have a common goal of ending homelessness.

COHHO has been at the forefront of gathering data and monitoring information about cold and heat alerts during hypothermia and hyperthermia seasons.¹ Exposure to extreme cold or extreme heat can result in death, and for homeless persons the risk of exposure to such extreme temperatures is a daily reality. For this reason, COHHO and its members have developed a system for tracking the daily weather conditions, the alert status, the nightly census in the homeless shelters, the open status of all the emergency shelters contracted in the District of Columbia's Continuum of Care, including hypothermia shelters, and the identities of those shelters that were over capacity on a given night.

The information for the 2012-2013 Hypothermia Season (November 1, 2012 – March 31, 2013) can be found in the attached Hypothermia Chart. The Chart begins in late October, 2012, because two alerts were called on October 29 and 30, and ends on April 8, because two alerts were called on April 3 and 4 (and one missed in early April). There are several sets of data incorporated into this Hypothermia Chart.

¹¹ COHHO or its member organizations have reported on Hypothermia for more than nine years. COHHO's reports are intended to amplify, not replace, reports prepared by or for The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness.

The weather data in the Hypothermia Chart is taken from the National Weather Service's Official Weather Data for Washington, DC. It is the actual data recorded each day. An alert is required by the Homeless Services Reform Act when the actual or forecasted temperature or wind chill will be 32° Fahrenheit or below. Thus, we measure when an alert should have been called based on actual readings. It is possible that more alerts should have been called based on forecasts.

On nights when an alert is called during the Hypothermia Season, the seasonal and hypothermia shelters are required to open and United Planning Organization (UPO) vans pick up homeless persons from the streets and take them to shelters. Once open, the seasonal shelters are supposed to remain open until March 31, but the CCNV seasonal shelters only admit new clients on hypothermia nights. The seasonal beds at other emergency shelters remain open until March 31 and admit new clients on any night once open. The Hypothermia Chart indicates when the hypothermia shelters were open, and when other emergency shelters were open or closed.

The Chart tracks census data for the emergency shelters according to men, women, family groups, and number of family members. The Chart indicates those days on which the system as a whole was at or over capacity for Men or Women; and indicates which shelters were over capacity on any night and by how many individuals or families. The Chart also indicates how many families were in motels and in the DC General shelter on each night.

ALERTS

Alerts were called on 95 days during the 2012-2013 Hypothermia Season (November 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013), plus the alerts on October 29 and 30 and on April 2 and 3. Based on actual data, COHHO found that alerts should have been called on twelve additional days² when the statutory standards were satisfied. This contrasts with 66 alerts called last year. However, in 2009-2010 there were 104 alerts called, and in 2008-2009 there were 117 alerts called.

This year, twice daily, the alert status was announced on the DHS website and via e-mail to a listserv of interested persons. This is a very positive development. The widespread and early notice of the alert status for the upcoming day and night gives both clients and service providers notice and the ability to plan.

DEATHS

It has been reported that there were two persons who may have been homeless whose deaths this winter have been attributed to hypothermia by the medical

²11/4, 11/16, 11/21, 11/23, 11/29, 1/8, 1/14, 1/16, 1/30, 2/12, 3/12, 3/16, and 4/5.

examiner. A man was found in a park, and a woman in an abandoned building. Because the purpose of the requirement to provide shelter on hypothermia nights is to avoid such deaths, we have asked that information be provided about the dates of death and other information that can be revealed without violating confidentiality so that steps can be taken to improve delivery of services to minimize the chances of such deaths in the future.

CAPACITY

Winter Plan

The 2012-2013 Winter Plan called for 1331 beds for men in emergency shelters, including 890 in year-round shelters, 126 seasonal beds, 315 in hypothermia shelters, and 35 overflow beds; 427 beds for women, including 313 in year-round shelters, 63 in seasonal beds, 35 in hypothermia shelters; and 16 overflow beds. The only facilities listed for families were 153 seasonal units at DC General. The Winter Plan states that there would be no families in motels on November 1, 2012, and that DHS would not exceed the 153 capacity at DC General.

Maximum Served

The maximum number of clients served on one night this year was 3260 (on March 27), and the number was above 3000 for 26 nights during the Hypothermia Season. The maximum last year was 2859, and was over 2700 only 9 nights.

Men

According to the daily census of beds available each night, during the 2012-2013 Hypothermia Season, when all beds, including hypothermia beds, were open, there were 1296 beds available for men. The 25 beds at First Rising Baptist were never available. In their place, 25 beds were available at the Kennedy Recreation Center from January 23, 2013. The 35 beds for men at the overflow shelter at DC General Cafeteria never opened, it being used for families after January 17. The CCNV seasonal shelter for men did not open until January 23, 2013.

The overall capacity for men was equaled or exceeded on 42 nights. The maximum number of male clients served on any night was 1355 (on March 27), and equaled or exceeded the 1331 anticipated in the Winter Plan on 18 nights.

Individual shelters were frequently over capacity. Of the 95 alert nights on which they were open, Sacred Heart was over capacity on 64 nights (67%), St. Luke's on 74 nights (78%), and Banneker Recreation Center on 51 nights (54%).

Kennedy Recreation Center, which first opened on January 23, was over capacity on 30 nights.

Women

According to the daily census of beds available each night, on hypothermic (alert) nights, there were 401 beds available until February 28, when the number increased to 406. The Winter Plan called for 15 seasonal beds at Nativity (Hermano Pedro) shelter. Instead, 5 hypothermia beds were initially provided and 5 seasonal beds were added on February 28. The 35 overflow beds called for in the Winter Plan never opened.

The overall capacity for women was equaled or exceeded on 11 non-alert nights. The maximum number of women served on a hypothermia night was 397 (on January 23 and March 8), and was 390 or more on 21 nights.

The Nativity (Hermano Pedro) shelter was over capacity on 66 nights during the Hypothermia Season (and 2 nights in October), but only once after the 5 beds were added on February 28.

Families

The Winter Plan anticipated only 153 families in DC General and no families in motels at the start of the Hypothermia Season. On the first alert night in October, there were 166 families at DC General and 12 families in motels.

The number of families in motels held steady at 12 through early December when it dropped to 7 until January 23. During December and January, the number of families in DC General increased until it reached last year's capacity of 271 family units on January 17. The DC General Cafeteria was then converted to family use, and up to 289 families were housed at DC General for the rest of the Hypothermia Season. The number of families in motels continued to increase after January 23, to a high of 166 on April 2.

The number of families at the end of Hypothermia Season (March 31) in DC General was 288 and in motels was 164. As of April 8, the end of our chart, there were 284 families at DC General and 157 in motels.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robert H. Swart
On behalf of the
COHHO Executive Board
cohho1@gmail.com
www.cohho.org

2012-2013 Introduction to COHHO HYPOTHERMIA CHART

The 2012-2013 **COHHO** Hypothermia Chart records for each day

- the High and Low temperatures,
- the Humidity, Precipitation, and Wind Chill;
- whether an Alert was called;
- the Total Number of Clients served;
- the total Men, total Women, total Family Units, and total Persons in Families;
- whether the Hypothermia Shelters were open and any exceptions;
- whether the Seasonal Beds and Shelters were open and any exceptions;
- whether the System as a whole was at (letter) or over (letter and number) Capacity for Men or Women;
- by how much any individual Shelter was over Capacity (SOC);
- the Number of Families in Motels and in the DC General Shelter;
- followed by Notes.

The Shelters and their identifying symbols are shown in the table on the next page.

SHELTERS

MEN	YR	SEAS	HYPO	SYMBOL
801 East	380	52		E
Adams Place	150	30		F
CCNV Drop-In Center			135	R
CCNV 3-South		44		V
New York Avenue	360			A
Banneker Recreation Center			40	B
First Rising Baptist			25	none
Sacred Heart Church			50	S
St. Luke's Church			30	L
Kennedy Recreation Center			25	K

WOMEN

CCNV 2-South		48		Z
Harriet Tubman	100			none
Hermano Pedro (WP)	20	15		P
(actual)	20	5	5	(seas) J (hypo) Q
John Young	85			none
New Covenant Church			25	T
Open Door 12 Hour	108			X
Open Door Hypothermia			10	H