

Officials begin clearing out homeless encampment in Anaheim, California

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Authorities in Anaheim, California have begun clearing out homeless encampments along the Santa Ana river where as many as 1,000 people live in tents and makeshift shelters. The largest encampment, a three-mile long tent city, is located near Angel Stadium, the home field of the Los Angeles Angels major league baseball team. The camp has attracted many for whom rent is too high in Orange and Los Angeles Counties.

Officials began posting formal notices in early January notifying residents that they must start moving out within two weeks. Shipping containers have been pre-placed throughout the embankment to store tons of trash and personal belongings once the evictions begin.

The city's plan is a "slow and methodical" drive to get the homeless to leave, with Orange County Sheriff's deputies and county workers descending at 9 a.m. on Monday morning along the flood control channel, which stretches from Anaheim to the City of Orange. County officials say this plan could take from several days to a few weeks without giving a firm deadline.

After the first week, once the local media leaves, the city will employ a tougher approach. Teams of police and health officials will request "voluntary compliance" for homeless individuals to leave, and if they don't, they will begin writing citations and making arrests. The teams will also ask people if they want to store or throw away their tents and belongings and have offered to kennel pets and keep items for up to 90 days. Officials have also offered to refer people to pickup locations where vans will take them to homeless shelters.

Beyond that, there is no official plan for where hundreds of people suffering from drug addiction, mental illness, and other life-threatening issues, will

stay. As of this year, Orange County has only 250 shelter beds available. More than three-fourths of those beds are in armory shelters, which do not allow residents to stay in the day time, and limit the belongings people can bring.

Of the 623 tent city residents the county has officially reached out to since July in Anaheim and Orange, only a quarter have been given shelter, another quarter are still waiting for housing and half refused services.

Many residents of the tent city worry just how "voluntary" the compliance will be to leave the Santa Ana embankment.

Conrad Alcaraz, a 40-year-old man who has not been able to find work since being injured in a car accident several years ago told the *Orange County Register*, "They're gonna come over and intimidate us," adding, "To me, this is home. How are they gonna kick us out? What shelter is open?"

Another homeless man, Nick Trullench, a former IT worker who lost his job due to health problems, told the *Register* that he is still waiting for a Section 8 housing voucher but will most likely end up on the streets of Anaheim or Orange. "Where else am I going to go?" he lamented, "They just don't want to see us. This is an issue of aesthetics for the county."

As part of an effort to ensure that the homeless do not congregate in other parts of the city, the Orange Police Department has put up notices in local neighborhoods asking residents to report illegal encampments and suspicious behavior. City officials have also hired private security to patrol public parks after hours.

Advocates for the homeless have rightly pointed out that eviction will just shuffle the poor and destitute into sleeping on sidewalks and other inhospitable parts of the city. Officials will close down the trail along the river for up to three months and afterwards will begin

regular patrols to prevent any camping.

The growth of a tent city in Anaheim, the home of Disneyland, and its eviction, is just the most visible sign of the homeless crisis in California, the most extreme in the nation. The immediate cause is unaffordable rent and wages that have not kept up with the increasing cost of living.

In 2017, homelessness grew by 1 percent across the United States, and in Orange County it increased by nearly 7 percent in the last two years. On any given night there were at least 4,792 people living on the streets or in emergency shelter last year. The number of people sleeping outside, without shelter, has gone up by 50 percent in the last four years.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, Orange County is one of the least affordable places to live in the United States with the general cost of living 43 percent above the national average. A single parent with two children working two minimum wage jobs would have to pay 59.5 percent of their income toward housing to pay for a two-bedroom apartment.

Such conditions are widespread throughout the United States. The UN special rapporteur on adequate housing, Leilani Farha, recently visited San Francisco, where she spoke to homeless people living in squalid conditions on the streets, including a man who was heating tortillas in a crockpot with burning paper. She told *The Guardian*, “The last time I saw cooking on a sidewalk was in Mumbai.”

In San Francisco alone, more than 7,500 homeless individuals were counted last year with two-thirds suffering from health conditions, including brain injury and HIV/AIDS. The waitlist to get into a city shelter is over 1,000 names long.

In the face of this growing crisis the Trump administration’s 2018 budget calls for \$6.2 billion in cuts to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as well as deep cuts to Medicaid and food stamps. The head of HUD, Ben Carson, infamously declared last year that poverty was merely a “state of mind.”



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