

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**



**INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS**

**Operations and Logistics Committee**

**Notes from the Hypothermia Debriefing for the 2010-2011 Season**

**Date of Debriefing:** Tuesday, May 3, 2011  
**Time:** 10am-12pm  
**Location:** Catholic Charities 924 G Street NW

**Chair:** Chapman Todd  
**Recorder:** Darrell Cason, Department of Human Services (DHS)  
**Participants:** Partners Involved in Hypothermia Operations during the 2010–11 Winter Season (November 1, 2010 through March 31, 2011)

**Purpose of the Meeting**

The purpose of the meeting was to review the efforts of those involved in carrying out the 2010–2011 Winter Plan to assess what worked and what needs improvement. We will use the information from this session to begin the development of the 2011–2012 Winter Plan. In this session, we addressed broad topic areas set forth in the agenda with the goal of finding ways to enhance services and improve performance during the upcoming winter season. During the 2010-2011 season there were 151 total calendar days, of those, 88 hypothermia alerts were called.

**Topic Areas**

**1. Public Information Campaign**

There were several comments that the timing of the production and the distribution of the cards was improved this year. There was a comment that the image used for the cards and the other public information materials should be revisited for future years. Some participants felt the pictures of struggling people were alienating for some people who rely on services. There was also a discussion about whether the space could be better used to convey information, for example the schedule for the van service.

**2. Calling of the Alerts**

There was a discussion around the opportunity to utilize social networking (Facebook, Twitter) in order to communicate calling of hypothermia alerts. In order for social networking options to

provide timely communication, the calling of the alerts will have to be projected out for that specific day.

Going forward, the Operations and Logistics Committee and DHS will discuss how to implement a communication plan that broadly informs all stakeholders when hypothermia alerts will be called. In addition, prior to the start of the Hypothermia season, DHS will ensure that all interested parties are properly registered to the hypothermia group, which provides emergency messages/pages from HSEMA pertaining to when alerts will be called.

There seems to be discrepancies between the National Weather Service and the DC Desk regarding the actual temperature as it pertains to the calling of the Hypothermia alerts.

### **3. Communications among the Partners**

For the 2010-2011 hypothermia season, a decision was made to initiate conference calls amongst the hypothermia partners on an as need basis. This method seemed to work for all parties, and will be included in the 2011-2012 Winter Plan.

### **4. Service Delivery**

The Community Partnership provided Winter Plan and Customer Service trainings to prepare for this year's hypothermia season. There were no concerns raised regarding the training or service delivery that was provided this season.

### **5. Transportation**

#### **Scheduled Transportation**

The only issue regarding scheduled transportation this year was that the MLK Library to Sacred Heart route did not consistently operate. Other than that, the comments indicated that the scheduled transportation generally operated very well. There was also some discussion about whether the buses that had been received from metro to assist in transportation would be utilized in the future.

#### **On-Demand Transportation**

During the course of the season there were a few minor issues that arose, but those concerns were addressed and taken care of immediately. Overall, the on-demand transportation services that were provided this season were effective.

### **6. Outreach Services**

The overall sense was that Outreach Services that were provided during the 2010-2011 hypothermia season went very well. There were a few issues that arose during the course of the

season, and the comments indicated that the outreach agencies were responsive, and all known issues were resolved in a timely manner.

It was also noted, that all outreach providers do not offer the same type of services, so in next year's plan specific outreach services ought to be listed per provider. In addition, there are gaps in street outreach for Wards 4 and 8 that need to be addressed in next year's plan.

## **7. Police and Security**

### **Police**

The overall sense was that MPD was very responsive in regards to providing support to homeless shelter facilities and referring persons to the hypothermia hotline.

### **Security**

Overall, the general consensus was that the security guards did a good job of keeping the facilities and its occupants safe. Security guards have historically only been posted at the year round low-barrier facilities, and it was suggested that security is needed at a few of the larger alert night sites, namely Sacred Heart and the CCNV Drop-In Center. The point was also made that because Sacred Heart consistently was consistently over capacity, staffing should reflect the actual number of people regularly using the facility.

For next year's plan, the group will explore the following options:

- Additional residential counselors at larger facilities
- Increased number of security guards at large facilities, including church-based sites
- Numerous searches during the course of the night

In addition, there was a concern that many of the security guards are not well versed in procedures and policies during hypothermia season, particularly in regards to protocol on alerts in the daytime hours. In order to solve this issue, TCP should be asked to ensure that all security guards complete the winter plan and hypothermia trainings before they are posted at a shelter site and that arrangements are made for training of guards who are placed in hypothermia facilities mid-season

## **8. Facilities**

Conditions in the hypothermia shelters were generally good this season. The comments reflected that facility requests were typically addressed in a timely manner and that there were no major facility issues this season.

The comments did indicate that the sturdier cots that were purchased after the start of the season held up better than the earlier model, but that problems continue. A recommendation was made to consider acquiring cots and furniture that are more suitable for some of the larger clients.

## **9. Capacity**

The general consensus was that the plan did an adequate job of predicting the capacity necessary.

For individuals, data showed that there were a few shelters namely, Banneker, St. Luke's and Sacred Heart that were consistently overcapacity. The overcrowding that occurred at these specific sites was attributed to clients that prefer to attend specific shelters because of their locations and the familiarity with the facility and/or the immediate neighborhood.

In the discussion regarding capacity for families, challenges in implementing the elements of the Winter Plan led to the system being overtaxed throughout the season. When approved by the ICH, the Winter Plan was premised on there being a significant number of vacancies at D.C. General Hospital at November 1, and this did not turn out to be the case. In addition, several of the sites included in the Plan did not come on line as scheduled, and the Short Term Housing Assistance program was under-utilized throughout the season.

The data on the family system operation during the 2010-2011 season was not fully completed and therefore not available for review at the debriefing session.

## **10. Communication about Client Deaths that May Be Attributable to Hypothermia**

There were several comments that there was quicker communication this year about situations in which hypothermia might be a cause of death, but that there had not been action towards the creation of a structured review committee. This should be included in the upcoming season's plan.

## **11. Recommended Action Steps**

1. Implement a better communication plan that broadly informs all stakeholders when hypothermia alerts will be called.
2. Explore how social networking tools can be utilized in order to communicate to all stakeholders
3. Provide a list of specific services offered by each outreach provider.
4. Provide security or additional residential counselors at the larger hypothermia sites.
5. Ensure that all interested parties are signed up to receive pages/texts from HSEMA.

**Table of Participants**

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