



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA · DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES
OFFICE OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

2009 “Code Red” Plan

Emergency Summer Outreach Plan for the Homeless

The City of Philadelphia, along with several private providers of services to the homeless, will again implement an emergency summer outreach plan (“Code Red”) in conjunction with the Health Department’s Heat Activities Plan. The Code Red plan is designed to provide services to homeless individuals identified as particularly vulnerable to heat-related illnesses during excessively hot and humid weather. The overall goal of these emergency efforts is to prevent heat-related illnesses and death among these individuals.

I. Need

The summers in Philadelphia are hot and humid. Heat waves—prolonged episodes of high temperatures and high levels of humidity—frequently sweep the City, making the lives of some miserable and threatening the lives of others. When exposed to high temperatures and humidity, people are susceptible to sunburn, heat edema, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and life threatening heat stroke. These heat-related illnesses can be avoided by moving to air-conditioned or well-ventilated areas.

Philadelphia citizens living on the streets are particularly vulnerable to heat-related illnesses as they are exposed to the extreme summertime conditions often with little or no options for finding relief. With coordinated outreach and targeted prevention efforts, this suffering can be avoided for many.

The Code Red plan coordinates and systematizes the efforts of City agencies, outreach organizations, and emergency housing programs during dangerously hot weather. When a Code Red is called according to the plan, outreach personnel from several organizations are mobilized to attend to the needs of people who are homeless and living on the streets, and trained personnel in both public and private emergency housing programs are placed on alert for the need to shelter them. In this manner, the Code Red plan pools the energies, talents, and resources of public and private agencies for the common cause of preserving the lives and health of Philadelphia citizens living on the streets.

II. Code Red

Code Red signifies a series of emergency procedures to assist persons living on the street whenever temperature and humidity exceed pre-determined levels for a pre-determined period.

A. Declaring Code Red

1. The Office of Supportive Housing (OSH) will declare a Code Red in the event that the City's Commissioner of Public Health declares a heat warning. Protocol:
 - Notification of the heat warning will be sent by the Commissioner of Public Health to the 311 Center and OSH. Once notified, OSH will declare a Code Red.
2. OSH will also declare a Code Red if the National Weather Service (NWS) extended weather forecast includes at least three consecutive days of 95° F or above temperatures with high humidity. In these situations, a heat warning is not needed to initiate a Code Red. Protocol:
 - In collaboration with the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) and the Outreach Coordination Center (OCC), OSH will monitor the NWS extended forecast. Given the appropriate weather conditions, OSH will declare a Code Red.

Once OSH declares a Code Red, OSH will notify Municipal Radio and emergency operations under this plan will commence. Municipal Radio will notify all persons listed on the Code Red Notification List. OCC will be responsible for mobilizing outreach teams and OSH will be responsible for notifying emergency housing providers and other food/water distribution points.

B. Code Red Services

In preparing to provide emergency services to the homeless, both summer outreach and emergency housing personnel will be offered training on preventing and identifying heat-related illnesses. This training will be provided by the Philadelphia Health Management Corporation.

Code Red services can be divided into two categories: outreach services and emergency housing services.

Outreach Services

As a first priority, outreach personnel will attempt to identify individuals living on the streets that are suffering from *acute* heat-related illnesses, such as heat stroke, and contact EMS (911). Second, outreach personnel will provide water and/or other non-alcoholic fluids to those on the streets who are not in an acute situation. Third, all persons identified as living on the streets, particularly homeless individuals who are more vulnerable to heat-related illnesses (elderly, substance abusers, the mentally ill, the physically disabled) will be assisted by outreach personnel in moving to appropriate emergency housing programs or other available air-conditioned public facilities. They also will provide transportation to designated emergency housing programs for those needing it or requesting it.

To evaluate plan performance, outreach personnel will report to OCC all services they provide to individuals having heat-related problems. Periodically, personnel from the field and administrative personnel will report the strengths and weaknesses of outreach efforts and possible modifications to the Outreach Planning Committee.

Emergency Housing Services

During heat emergencies the first floors (or other comparable areas) of air-conditioned city-funded emergency housing programs and cooperating private emergency housing programs will be opened for persons who are living on the streets. They will be opened as much as possible but particularly in the afternoons, during the hottest part of the day. A list of these emergency housing programs will be maintained by OSH and OCC. Emergency housing programs will provide fluids to persons who come in during the Code Red. Trained personnel will provide information (verbal and written) on the proper precautions to take during extreme summer weather. Emergency housing programs with sufficient bath facilities will also open those facilities during Code Red. Emergency housing programs will refer those suffering from acute heat-related illnesses to appropriate emergency health care services.

C. Terminating Code Red

If a Code Red is called due to the Health Commissioner's declaration of a heat warning, the heat warning must be terminated before a Code Red can be called off. Protocol:

- The Health Commissioner will terminate the heat warning when appropriate information is received from the NWS.
- Notification of the heat warning will be sent by the Commissioner of Public Health to the 311 Center, Municipal Radio and OSH.

Once the heat warning is terminated, OSH and DBH will determine if the hazardous weather has passed, according to the NWS extended forecast, and that the Code Red can be called off. If not, the Code Red will remain in effect until the hazardous weather leaves Philadelphia.

If a Code Red is declared as a result of OSH's and DBH's monitoring of the NWS forecast, it will be *terminated on the concurrence of OSH and DBH* that the dangerous weather has passed. OSH will notify Municipal Radio of the Code Red termination.

D. Roles and Responsibilities of Agencies and Organizations

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

As part of the Code Red operations, DPH will:

- Declare a heat warning when excessively hot and humid weather is expected;
- Inform 311 Call Center of the declared heat warning; and
- Inform OSH of the heat warning.

DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH (DBH)

- Coordinate, facilitate Outreach services via the OCC
- Collaborate with OSH regarding declaration of Code Red
- Monitor OCC and delivery of services

OFFICE OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (OSH)

As part of the Code Red operations, OSH will:

- Monitor NWS forecasting channels and coordinate declarations of Code Red with DBH, and Health Department;
- Contact Municipal Radio when a Code Red is called or terminated;
- Oversee training of emergency housing personnel;
- Evaluate the appropriateness of facilities (i.e., cool or well-ventilated, accessible, and sufficiently large and the adequacy of bath facilities) for use in emergency sheltering;
- Coordinate and supervise public and private emergency housing programs participating in emergency sheltering efforts;
- Acquire and distribute beverages for those accessing shelter services; and
- Distribute posters and other materials on heat illness prevention and identification.

OUTREACH COORDINATION CENTER (OCC)

As part of the Code Red operations, the OCC will:

- Monitor NWS forecasting channels and coordinate declarations of Code Red with OSH;
- Oversee training of outreach personnel;
- Schedule, supervise, and coordinate professional, consumer, and volunteer outreach teams and assign sector coverage;
- Acquire and distribute beverages for outreach activities;
- Respond to calls seeking assistance for persons in need of heat-related services;
- Maintain communications with OSH to determine shelter availability; and
- Maintain records on services provided during Code Red operations.

PHILADELPHIA HEALTH MANAGEMENT CORPORATION (PHMC)

As part of the Code Red operations, PHMC will:

- Provide training and information on heat illness prevention and identification to outreach and shelter personnel.