

Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations (COHHO)

2012 Hyperthermia Comments

To: Allen Y Lew, City Administrator
David A. Berns, Director, DHS
Patricia Handy, Homelessness Services, 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, and the nightly census in the city contracted emergency homeless shelters.

There is no statutory definition of the Hyperthermia Season. It is generally considered to coincide with the meteorological summer which runs from June 1 through August 31. COHHO generally reports on the period from the first day on which the temperature or heat index reached or exceeded 95°F, the statutory standard² for calling a hyperthermia alert, through the last such day. In 2012, that period (the Hyperthermia Season) began on May 28 and extended through September 8.

The accompanying Chart shows the official NOAA³ temperature and heat index and other weather conditions for Washington, D.C., for each day from May 27 through September 11, and the dates on which alerts were called. According to the weather data, alerts should have been called on 36 of the 108 days shown on the chart or 33%

¹ COHHO or its member organizations have reported on extreme weather for more than ten years. COHHO's reports are intended to amplify, not replace, reports prepared by or for The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness.

² HSRA, Sec. 2(35).

³ The data for June 8 is from www.almanac.com/weather/history/DC.

of the days in the Hyperthermia Season. This is consistent with the last two years in which there were 38 out of 104 (37%) days and 47 out of 125 (38%) days on which alerts should have been called. In contrast, there were only 9 such days in 2009 and 21 such days in 2008. Clearly, 2012 was a very hot summer, but, in terms of alert days, not as hot as 2010 or 2011.

Alerts were actually called on 31 days, but on 3⁴ of those days neither the temperature nor the heat index reached 95°. In addition, on 8⁵ days on which the 95° mark was reached an alert was not called. This means on 22% of the days on which there should have been an alert, no alert was called. This is an unacceptable error rate. Excess heat jeopardizes the life and health of homeless individuals and those without access to airconditioning. The City is required by statute to provide cooling centers on such days.⁶

It is important to note that August 31 and four days in September were the majority of the days on which required alerts were not called. This means that the City must be more diligent and conscious of the possibility of extreme temperatures at the end of the traditional Hyperthermia Season.

The attached chart also details the number of persons and families using the City's emergency shelters each night, broken down by gender. The chart shows under the column labeled "CAP" (for capacity) the days on which the system reached capacity for men, women, or families (represented by an initial), or exceeded capacity and by how many (initial followed by a number). The column labeled "SOC" (Shelter Over Capacity) details each night when there were 'overflow' persons in any men's or women's shelter (persons in excess of the number of beds in any given shelter), and the number of such persons.

The men's shelters as a whole were at or over capacity (890) on 51 nights (47% of the nights on the chart). An individual men's shelter exceeded capacity ten nights. Daily usage ranged from a low of 823 on June 30 to highs of 913 on June 20 and 915 on July 19.

On only 13 nights were women's shelters as a whole at or over capacity (313). On 8 nights an individual women's shelter was overcapacity. The minimum number of women served was 291 on July 2, and the maximum was 316 on August 3.

Until August 1, the Daily Census continued the traditional practice of reporting the number of families and number of persons in those families served in 5 transitional shelters, the community based shelters, and the emergency shelter at DC General. The number of families in these facilities began at 392 on May 27 and was as high as 404 from June 15 through 17, but gradually declined to 365 on July 31. Families sheltered in hotels/motels were reported in separate weekly DHS reports and are not included in the COHHO chart before August 1.

⁴ Alerts which, according to the weather data, were not required were called on 6/23, 6/24, and 8/12.

⁵ On 7/5, 7/23, 8/8, 8/31, 9/1, 9/4, 9/5, and 9/8. On three of these days both temperature and heat index exceeded 95°.

⁶ HSRA, Sec. 7(c). See also Sec. 13(4), (5).

Beginning on August 1, the Daily Census ceased reporting on those families in the transitional shelters and began to include families in hotels/motels and in short term lease units. The capacity figure at DC General was reduced to 153, even though more facilities are in use. This means that families are reported at overcapacity (the total of families over 153 at DC General plus those in hotels/motels and short term lease units) throughout August and September.

System wide, there were 2399 total persons in the emergency shelters on the first night covered by COHHO's chart and the total peaked at 2493 persons on June 20. The total number of persons served never fell below 2353 until the change in the family count on August 1. There were 2409 total persons in the emergency shelters on July 31.

Respectfully Submitted,

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KEY TO Hyperthermia Chart

Shelter Symbols

A	New York Av (Men)
E	801 East (Men)
P	Hermano Pedro (Women)