

Without Warning, Self-Help Survival Camp Forcibly Dispersed Massive Police Action Contradicts Prior Assurances, City Policy

On Friday morning, more than a dozen SCPD, Rangers, Highway Patrol, and First Alarm swooped down on 50-60 unhoused people at the Phoenix (Desiree Memorial Survival Camp). The armed officers forced them to leave without providing a safe legal alternative for many of them. Those uprooted were given no warning, though the City's official guidelines for displacing campsites requires a 72-hour notification, outreach to the residents, and many other requirements. (See Standard Operating Procedure Requirements, City Council Agenda 4-9-19).

Observers and evicted residents noted that the City's "homelessness assistant" Megan Bunch offered two-day motel vouchers only to a few ignoring others. Bunch did not inform some that motel vouchers were available. Many had to abandon their tents and belongings. Police offered to assist them carry their goods out of the camp, but not to find alternate shelter.

A significant majority of the City's 1000-2000 experiencing homeless have historically had no shelter in spite of the City's appropriations and claims. After months of City Council's refusal to set up safe sleeping spaces or survival campgrounds, the *California Union of the Homeless* entered an area not posted with "no trespassing" signs five days before. They set up a monitoring system with five rules: no thefts, no violence, the hours of sweat equity work to maintain the camp per week, no visible drug use, and no sustained disruptive behavior. Under pressure from police & fire officials, the fourth rule was modified to "no illegal drug use" at all.

In the days before the sudden eviction, the Fire Department worked with the Union campsite to propose appropriate fire lanes and tent placement. *Food Not Bombs* provided portapotties and hand-washing stations (including the first disabled accessible one in the City). For months, City Manager Bernal refused to expand or reopen bathroom access at Louden Nelson Center and elsewhere. Winter shelter availability (mats on the floor) is far less than last year. Community members assisted residents in leveling the many piles of wood chips, left untended after it dispersed hundreds of residents months ago without providing adequate shelter at that time.

An earlier statement by SCPD chief Andy Mills was reiterated the day before his police marched into the camp (<https://chiefmills.com/2019/11/14/homeless-in-santa-cruz-ross-camp-2-0/>) that the camp while not sanctioned was not illegal. This matched his response when appearing personally at the encampment. The officers who initially were confronted by *Santa Cruz Union of Homeless* activists on Sunday morning also acknowledged the camper's presence was not illegal. They left and left the camp alone until their sudden reappearance five days later.

Activists and residents were enraged and bewildered by the police action and vowed to set up alternative survival camps. **A Santa Cruz Union meeting will take place Sunday November 17 5 PM at the *Food Not Bombs* meal to discuss the situation. Those who wish to volunteer time or supplies for survival campsites can contact the *Union* at 431-7766.** City officials are reportedly moving to create harsher laws against the homeless at their 11-26 Council meeting with no planned increase in the deficient winter shelter availability.