



NCH has posted the Dirty Dozen Meanest Communities list on our website here:
<https://nationalhomeless.org/dirty-dozen-meanest-cities/>

This document can be used by the local communities to counter the negative rhetoric that is surrounding sweeps. The National Coalition for the Homeless is publishing and publicizing the meanest cities nationally, and we are providing talking points to use in the media to counter these draconian policies. NCH using National Healthcare for the Homeless data estimates that there were over 17,600 people died last year while experiencing homelessness which is 48 deaths per day in the United States, and we read the names of 5,000 people in February who passed away. The National Coalition for the Homeless is available to help if you need additional information, statistics, or media help contact Brian Davis at bdavis@nationalhomeless.org. or Donald Whitehead at dwhitehead@nationalhomeless.org. The criteria for the above list were:

1. Disproportionate numbers of people dying while experiencing homelessness.
2. Regular sweeps conducted by the police over the last year.
3. Attempts by local advocates to stop the sweeps that were rebuffed by local leaders.
4. We took into account the frequency and cruelty of the local police in conducting sweeps.
5. An escalating number of evictions without a local plan to stop people from becoming homeless
6. And an increasing lack of affordable housing with long waiting lists and an insufficient emergency response to this crisis.

Talking points to use at the local level to oppose sweeps.

- Once you send the police out to harass citizens it is impossible to get their trust back when offering housing or services.
- It extends the stay of those who are without housing because they basically start over every time there is a sweep.
- A sweep is an act of violence against taxpayers by sending an armed group out to throw away people's valuables.
- It does nothing to reduce the number of people dying each day on the streets of the US.

- It complicates the behavioral health issues faced by many because of the stress put on their treatment regimen. In addition, medicine is often lost in the frequent and hurried packing up to relocate.
- It often results in the individual entering the racist criminal justice system in the US, and therefore the sweep itself is an act of racism against people of color.
- Sweeps are a sure sign that government is giving up on ever ending homelessness in their community. A sweep is a sign that they have no hope in a social service response to the affordable housing crisis and will use law enforcement to solve these issues.
- Hate crimes will increase against those without housing. Once government gives permission to treat those without housing as criminals, it is open season for the fringe in our society to attack vulnerable people.
- Attacking the fragile and traumatized who stay outside is a canary in a coal mine. Once government sees temporary success in clearing a campsite, they will start using law enforcement for other social service holes in the safety net. Lock them up will be the mantra at City Hall.
- It is far more expensive for government to engage in criminalization than it is to give a hand up to assist people into housing. Some estimates say four to five times the cost of providing housing.
- Government exists to serve the needs of its people. This is an inappropriate response to a problem largely out of the control of the person experiencing homelessness. If our healthcare and judicial systems operated from a social justice perspective, homelessness would be a short and temporary condition in our society.
- A government created internment camp to move all the displaced into one section of the city is not the appropriate response (<https://nationalhomeless.org/sanctioned-encampment-policy/>). We have tried this a number of times in US history and they never work. It is another form Jim Crow era “red lining” poor people that has its foundation in racist government policies.
- Government has an obligation to help those struggling to survive and not make life more difficult with a sweep. Frequent moves and forced displacements complicate the health of those already traumatized.
- There is no evidence that those without housing are inherently dangerous in most cases so therefore sending law enforcement out is an inappropriate response to a supply and demand issue.
- These local governments are receiving millions in federal support because they have a homeless problem. Then to turn around and make those same individuals into criminals is the height of hypocrisy.
- During a health emergency that features an air borne communicable virus, shelter is not an adequate response to a housing crisis. Many people are afraid of shelters and do not want to risk their health sleeping next to a large number of people.
- Every major faith teaches us to “welcome the stranger” sending police out to arrest those struggling with their housing is not welcoming.
- It is already difficult serving a person without a permanent residence, but displacing them every few weeks just makes it impossible for outreach/social services to find their clients to continue to offer help.