

At least 5 people died from hypothermia during Seattle cold snap

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Surrounded by waters covered with ice in Sinclair Inlet at Elanden Gardens near Bremerton, an eagle sits on a pylon in 32 degree weather Tuesday, January 16, 2024. Highs should reach the high 30's Wednesday and... (Ellen M. Banner / The Seattle Times) [More](#) ▾

By [Lauren Girgis](#) 

Seattle Times staff reporter

At least five people have died from hypothermia in Seattle since Jan. 11, during a stretch of days that saw temperatures plummet well below freezing, according to the King County Medical Examiner's office.

Authorities have not said whether any of them were experiencing homelessness, but extreme cold presents a troubling and increasingly common danger facing the people forced to live outside.

The youngest was 37-year-old Adam Quinn Elknation, who died outside on

Seneca Street in downtown Seattle.

William Buen Macabitas, 67, also died outside, near a housing complex on Rainier Avenue South.

Jay Matthew Anderson, 63, died in a vehicle parked outside the Seattle Public Library Ballard Branch.

Two others died in residences: 67-year-old Mehri Berhe Tesfa and 53-year-old David N. Tinker.

The number of homeless people dying from environmental exposure — including hypothermia and hyperthermia — has gone up in recent years, from zero in 2012 to nine in 2021, according to Public Health — Seattle & King County. That's about one additional death per year on average.

As the region's weather patterns grow more extreme and the homelessness crisis gets worse, that deadly pattern may continue. There are simply not enough shelter beds and even fewer emergency weather beds to keep everyone warm.

Weather shelters across King County [quickly filled up last Friday](#), leading the King County Regional Homelessness Authority to work with the city of Seattle and The Salvation Army to add 100 more shelter beds at the Seattle Center Exhibition Hall — the city's largest severe weather shelter — totaling 300 spaces for Saturday night.

During the 2022 Point in Time count, more than 13,000 people were counted experiencing homelessness in one day in King County, with more than 7,600 of them living outside — and that's likely an undercount.

From Jan. 12 through Jan. 15, the Seattle Fire Department was dispatched to at least 42 calls related to cold weather, spokesperson David Cuerpo said. Crews in two Health One units — alternative response vehicles staffed by firefighters and case managers from the Seattle Human Services Department — assisted more than 200 homeless people by taking them to shelters, providing clothing or using an ambulance bus for temporary warming.

Cuerpo said the weekend was “one of the busiest” in the department's history, in large part due to responses for burst water pipes.

“We responded across the City to hundreds of incidents for burst water pipes, and to many individuals for exposure to the cold temperatures,” Fire Chief Harold Scoggins said in an email. “Before the next cold spell, we advise all residents and business owners to take steps to winterize their property in an effort to prevent pipes from freezing.”

On Sunday, the Fire Department responded to 609 incidents. In January of last year, the Fire Department averaged 282 dispatches per day.

The King County Medical Examiner's Office reported that at least five people presumed to be homeless died from hypothermia last year.

Material from The Seattle Times archives was used in this report.

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