

# Douglas County Extreme Weather Emergency Shelter

---

2024 HANDBOOK

## **Purpose of Extreme Weather Emergency Shelters**

Extreme cold, heat and storm conditions endanger the lives of housed and unhoused people in our community every year. The primary purpose of the Douglas County Extreme Weather Emergency Shelter (EWES) plan is to save lives and equip community agencies and organizations with a resource to support the expansion of extreme weather emergency sheltering needs in our community. EWES sites are intended to provide a safe environment and the necessities of life that will give the individuals experiencing homelessness the comfort we all deserve.

This document was developed as part of [A Place for Everyone](#), Douglas County and the City of Lawrence's strategic plan to end chronic homelessness in Douglas County. Special thanks to the following agencies for working to develop this plan:

- Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center
- City of Lawrence Homeless Initiatives Division
- Douglas County Emergency Management
- Lawrence-Douglas County Fire and Medical
- Lawrence Community Shelter

## **SHELTER OVERVIEW**

### **1. Who We Serve**

Extreme Weather Emergency Shelters (EWES) are open to men, women, and any gender non-conforming individual. EWES are intended for those that are experiencing homelessness or may not be able to meet necessary warming or cooling needs due financial constraints or precarious housing conditions from the Lawrence/Douglas County community. Families will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis by contacting the Douglas County Homelessness Response Team Lead at 785-813-9483.

*Guests from other cities/states must be redirected to their city of origin. Diversion training can be made available to any agency or organization wishing to receive it from the Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC) partners.*

### **2. Capacity**

EWES are designed to serve up to 40 individuals at a single site.

### **3. Eligibility**

EWES sites will attempt to provide a cool or warm space to rest and stay safe while following established policies and procedures. Should the determination be made that an individual is below the age of 18, not safe for the EWES, or not from Lawrence/Douglas County management will advise the individual of the guidelines and try to help them develop an alternate plan.

### **4. Shelter Model**

EWES strive to operate in what is known as a "Harm-Prevention Model". This means that guests may be able to access the EWES under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Access determinations in these cases may be determined on a site-by-site basis depending on the hosting partner organization. *Harm-Prevention Model and Harm Reduction training can be made available to any agency or organization wishing to receive from the CoC.*

In the case that a guest's behavior is inappropriate (they become a threat to the safety of themselves, others or generally causes a disturbance) and de-escalation measures are ineffective, the guest will be asked. If a person is a danger to others, EWES staff should call 911. Guest should not be allowed to have any alcohol, narcotics, or weapons on their persons or stored on the property. The presence of such items or substances may result in the guest being exited.

## 5. Activation

EWES sites will be open when inclement weather is anticipated or starts occurring. For the purpose of this document, “inclement weather” is defined as severe weather conditions which are determined to threaten the safety of lives or property. Douglas County Emergency Management will monitor conditions in cooperation with the National Weather Service and issue guidance via the Everbridge emergency notification system. EWES leadership are encouraged to sign up for the Northeast [Kansas Regional Notification System Emergency Alert Program](#). See Appendix A for additional information regarding criteria for extreme heat weather conditions.

## 6. Hours of Operation

EWES are encouraged to be open to guests 24/7 during inclement weather if conditions pose threats to health and wellbeing of unsheltered or precariously housed individuals. If a 24/7 schedule cannot be accommodated, consideration should be given to implementing a warming or cooling site during the day and coordinating care for individuals in need of overnight sheltering with the City/County Homeless Response Team by calling 785-813-9483.

## 7. Guest Check-In

### ***For First-Time Guests***

- a. When a guest arrives for the first time, they need to read (or have read to them) the EWES guest agreement which can be found in Appendix B.
- b. Next, guests need to sign the appropriate registration form for the first night.
- c. Give each guest a blanket, mat, pillow, and provide a brief tour/orientation. Show them the shelter boundaries, their bed, drinks/snack area, and the bathroom.
- d. Share any helpful or relevant information about the EWES with each guest.
- e. **Connecting with first-time guests is one of the most important tasks you will have as staff. Make them feel at home and cared for in this process. This is key!**

### ***For Returning Guests***

Returning guests who have completed the steps outlined for the first-time guest need to sign in on the EWES Sign-In Sheet only. These guests should then be directed to the staff or volunteers at the area.

## 8. Meals

Guests will be transported to local agencies for breakfast and lunch. Dinner will be organized through community/faith partners.

## 9. Clothing Distribution

Clothing is given out by request after check-in and intake. EWES sites will fulfill requests as able.

## 10. Smoking Area

Guests must smoke in the designated area only.

## 11. EWES Wellness Check

EWES staff will complete a wellness check every hour. This is a basic walkthrough of the entire facility, making sure all guests are doing alright within the shelter, and that everything is safe and secure.

## 12. Guest Check Out

When Guests check-out but want to return, please have them bag up their blanket. Label the bag with guest's name and the current date and time. Make sure guests are informed that belongings left unattended for more than 24 hours will be recycled into donations since storage space is limited.

## 13. Laundering Blankets

EWES staff will launder blankets.

#### 14. Cleaning Areas

Sleeping mats should be wiped down and stacked after each use. Commonly used areas need to be sanitized and wiped down (handrails, tables, chairs, etc.). Trash and recycling should be emptied regularly.

#### 15. Cleaning Supplies

Cleaning supplies can be found in the office.

#### 16. Inventory

Every evening the staff on shift will take inventory of the supplies (cleaning, food, clothing, forms, office supplies etc.) and notify the group text of needs.

#### 17. Corrective Action Overview

EWES does not want to ban any guests and will attempt to work with all that come to EWES for shelter. If an individual is not able to stay due to their behavior, EWES staff will attempt to take the least restrictive measures for the guest to rectify the situation, building upon restrictions as necessary to keep all parties safe.

- **Warning Process**

- Guests will receive a “verbal warning” from the staff if they are not following important community agreements/rules. If the behavior continues regarding the same issue, an exit can be rightfully administered if it is necessary to keep all parties safe. If an exit is ordered, it will be logged in a form that all staff have access to. This will include the individual’s name, the date the exit was issued, and the date the individual is eligible to return.

- **Barring Guests**

- We will bar all guests that commit acts or threats of violence, stealing, or possessing or using alcohol or narcotics on the property, or guests that consistently violate the community agreement and have already been warned. Staff has the authority and discretion to bar a guest as they deem appropriate. All bars are indefinite, but the guest can meet with leadership meeting to request their bar be lifted. Guests must wait 24 hours before they can request a meeting to have bar lifted. Requests to have a bar lifted will be considered by EWES leadership on a case-by-case basis. **ALL INCIDENTS WILL BE DOCUMENTED ON THE INCIDENT LOG AND A EWES INCIDENT FORM WILL BE COMPLETED.**

- **Properly Exiting Guests**

If a guest cannot stay for any reason, EWES staff will attempt to provide individuals with connection to a different shelter or proper cold weather gear/tent to keep them as safe as possible. If a guest refuses to exit, call 911 and notify the supervisor on staff.

- **Bar List**

EWES staff will keep track of all barred guests.

#### 18. Police

The LKPD or DGCO Sheriff Department may periodically bring potential guests to the shelter. EWES staff will always cooperate fully with law enforcement officers.

#### 19. Visitors

Everyone who is at a EWES site needs to sign-in as a guest or register as a volunteer, otherwise they should not be on site.

#### 20. SPECIAL ISSUES

- a. **Apparent Communicable Illnesses**

Guests exhibiting overt symptoms of communicable illness or disease (as identified by Douglas County Health Department) will be issued a mask during the check-in process. Hand sanitizers and hand washing stations are available. Some separation may be necessary, but masks and other measures will aid in lowering transmission risk.

- b. **Service Animals/Pets**

The purpose of EWES sites is to provide emergency shelter for the homeless, many of whom suffer from mental disorders that cause instability and unpredictable responses to stimuli. Therefore, a EWES

site may encounter guests with service animals. It is a discriminatory act to not give shelter or service to those with verified service animals. As such, EWES will give shelter to those whom EWES staff verify as having service animals. Prospective guests who present with a pet or emotional support animal will be directed to the Lawrence Community Shelter or other sheltering options that accept pets.

### **c. Concerns Resulting from Symptoms of Mental Disorders**

When possible, there will be an effort to address guest concerns, such as the need for more space or being in an area away from the general population which will allow them to be sheltered but not affected by or affect other shelter guests/patrons. If a guest is experiencing a behavioral or mental health crisis and does not respond to assistance from staff, staff can call 988 on behalf of guest. Staff/guests may also contact the Douglas County Crisis Line at 785-841-2345. Highly trained counselors will answer the calls and could potentially alert the Mobile Crisis Team.

## **21. Media Interactions**

Should media representatives call or arrive at the Shelter, Staff will advise Shelter Manager immediately. Care will be taken to assure guests privacy and will not open access to guests at any time. Naturally should a guest choose to engage the media this is the prerogative. All photographs must have a Release Form signed by the guest to protect the guest's identity and privacy.

## **22. Intoxicated Individuals**

Individuals who arrive at the shelter intoxicated will be allowed to shelter, contingent upon their ability to maintain control of themselves and continue to provide safety to themselves and others. EWES staff will have discretion in these matters. If a guest must exit, please see "Properly Exiting Guest" section. Staff will determine if the individual is able to safely find alternative shelter first, and if the situation is still not safe, staff will call 911 for help.

## **23. Suicidal Or Homicidal Ideation**

If a guest expresses suicidal or homicidal thoughts EWES staff will call 911 immediately.

## **24. Families with Children**

Families with Children are not able to be served at EWES. Any family with children that arrives at EWES will be referred to the City/County Homelessness Response Team (HRT) at 785-813-9483. The HRT will help families develop a proper plan for emergency sheltering.

## **25. Under Age 18**

If a guest comes in who looks to be under the age of 18 years old and is unaccompanied by an adult, please ask to see their ID. If they refuse or tell you that they don't have an I.D., register them, and make them feel safe. If someone comes in and says they are under 18, or their I.D. proves they are under 18, please notify supervisor on staff.

## **26. Incidents/Emergencies**

- If there is ever a need for enforcement or a law is being broken, call 911 immediately. Please call and update 911 dispatchers if the incident evolves or changes.
- Notify the supervisor on staff whenever there is an incident where 911 is notified, or you have a question about how to handle a difficult situation.

## **27. Nightly Monitoring and Safety/Security**

- All minor or major incidents should be recorded on the incident log and an incident report needs to be completed (particularly when assistance is requested via 911). Staff will monitor EWES site property (inside and outside) regularly to ensure the safety of the community during all hours of operation.
- EWES staff will monitor and observe guest presentations and interactions. Staff will take action when needed regarding guests presenting issues such as physical health (staff will utilize 911 & will not transport guests and follow Blood Borne Pathogen Process), substance abuse, mental health, acting out, aggressive behavior, escalation, triggers, etc. If safety is a concern, they will determine how to de-escalate the situation, separate individuals, or undertake other methods of handling presenting issues, including calling 911.

- In addition, EWES staff will conduct regular welfare monitoring activities relative to shelter safety and guest health as well as checking for fire hazards, gas leaks, water main breaks, etc. Staff must also maintain a fire watch during all hours of operation and note the condition hourly. Please note any damage or unusual conditions in the report, as well as sharing this with the person designated from the building site to contact.

## **Appendix A - Additional Considerations**

- **Code Compliance** - Ensure compliance with local zoning code for use as temporary shelter. Contact City or County Planning and Zoning Department to determine, including compliance with fire code for safety considerations, and access to sufficient restrooms to ensure health and hygiene needs are met for guests.
- **Heat Criteria** – The City of Lawrence Homelessness Initiatives Division routinely deploys cooling shelters at community buildings and centers (Community Building, Holcomb Building and East Lawrence Community Building). Before opening a cooling shelter please identify facilities with access to water fountains or coolers to ensure easy guest access to fresh water.
  - Excessive Heat Outlooks—Be Aware! The outlooks are issued when the potential exists for an excessive heat event in the next 3-7 days. An Outlook provides information to those who need considerable lead-time to prepare for the event.
  - Heat Advisory—Take Action! A Heat Advisory is issued within 12 hours of the onset of extremely dangerous heat conditions. The general rule of thumb for this Advisory is when the maximum heat index temperature is expected to be 100° or higher for at least 2 days, and nighttime air temperatures will not drop below 75°.
  - Excessive Heat Watches—Be Prepared! Heat watches are issued when conditions are favorable for an excessive heat event in the next 24 to 72 hours. A Watch is used when the risk of a heat wave has increased but its occurrence and timing is still uncertain.
  - Excessive Heat Warning—Take Action! An Excessive Heat Warning is issued within 12 hours of the onset of extremely dangerous heat conditions. The general rule of thumb for this Warning is when the maximum heat index temperature is expected to be 105° or higher for at least 2 days and nighttime air temperatures will not drop below 75°.
- **Staffing plan** – Designation of a shelter manager is crucial. Shelter manager will be responsible for enforcing the EWES plan and supervision of any volunteers to ensure safety of guests and volunteers.
  - The United Way of Kaw Valley can be a resource partner identifying volunteer needs.
  - Licensed social workers in Kansas may be compelled to volunteer (with compensation) to provide mental health resources that may be needed.
  - The American Red Cross would not be able to operate EWES, however they can work in cooperation with EWES site management to provide assistance with training or to provide water, snacks, and supplies (cots, blankets, etc.) depending on available resources.
  - Consider peer support services that may be available through Douglas County community partners including but not limited to Heartland RADAC, DCCCA, Artists Helping the Homeless and Douglas County Peer Fellows.
- **Training** – Just in time training for shelter management, staff, and volunteers is available through Douglas County Emergency Management and the American Red Cross. Specialty population/need training is available through the Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center for Mental Health First Aid, de-escalation, and violence prevention. Online training resources are also available through Bert Nash and can be shared with EWES management.
- **Supplies** – The American Red Cross can provide water, snacks, and possibly blankets and cots. Consider military surplus stores for additional needs. In addition to water, snacks, cots, blankets, necessary items should include:
  - Pillow and washable pillowcases/covers
  - Hygiene supplies
  - Cleaning supplies
  - Food and drink storage and management
  - Pet food
  - Shelf stable food
  - First aid
- **Planning for closing** – Coordinate with community partners and first responders to ensure a smooth transition when it is time to close shelter operations as weather conditions no longer necessitate EWES. This transition may be traumatic for guests and necessitate additional supports. The Homeless Response Team (HRT) and local housing partners that work with the local [Continuum of Care](#) (CoC).

## **Appendix B – Extreme Weather Emergency Shelter Guest Agreement**

**I agree to the following:**

1. No pets
2. No weapons
3. No on-site drug or alcohol use
4. Agree to behave safely inside
5. Agree to store personal belongings in storage totes