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County Council Continues Outreach To Assist People During ‘Code Blue’ Conditions

With frigid temperatures gripping the region, County Council reminds residents that various County agencies offer additional supports to the homeless, elderly and vulnerable residents when “Code Blue” conditions take place.

A “Code Blue” declaration is made when the combination of air temperature and wind chill is anticipated to be 20 degrees or less and conditions pose a threat to individuals, especially those who are homeless or medically fragile.

After last weekend’s bone-chilling temperatures, the National Weather Service is again calling for below-freezing temperatures this weekend into next Tuesday, including another forecast for snow showers tomorrow.

“There are several ways that County agencies try to help residents cope with extreme weather conditions, from sheltering the homeless to reaching out to the elderly,” said County Council member Thomas McGarrigle, Council’s liaison to the Human Services Department. “It’s important for residents to know about these services so we can look out for each other, and everyone can stay safe and healthy.”

- The **Delaware County Adult Services Division** of the Office of Behavioral Health partners with various agencies to offer additional services through the Homeless Services Coalition of Delaware County.
- The **County Office of Services for the Aging (COSA)** extends outreach to senior citizens, including having case managers check on seniors who may be vulnerable.
- The **County Department of Intercommunity Health** provides information to help people avoid medical emergencies, such as hypothermia and frost bite, during Code Blue conditions.

Councilman McGarrigle said homeless shelters in the county are reporting a slight increase in the number of people needing services and have added beds to accommodate additional people.

(more)

(Code Blue, add 1)

McGarrigle detailed the expanded services that are put into place during harsh weather conditions.

“Delaware County has many programs that assist homeless people year-round, but we want to stress that extra precautions are taking place during the winter months,” McGarrigle said. “We especially want our local police and social services agencies to know about these resources as they come in contact with residents who might need help.”

When the temperature drops to 32 degrees or below, a network of agencies goes to work to help people obtain shelter, food and clothing. The county’s Adult Services Division, based in Upper Darby, participates in the leadership of the Homeless Services Coalition, a group of 90 individuals and organizations dedicated to assisting the homeless. During a Code Blue, authorities can take homeless adults to shelter programs, which are operated by the Salvation Army Chester Corps and Connect, a project of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

Both programs offer overnight shelter at host churches and provide transportation from pick-up points at the Salvation Army in Chester and the 69th Street Terminal in Upper Darby. The Salvation Army’s Stepping Stone Day Center is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Connect-By-Night is a program offered through Connect, an agency of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, which helps homeless people find and use services to become more self-sufficient.

In Upper Darby, homeless adults can find shelter at the Life Center of Eastern Delaware County. Homeless families with children can be referred to the Community Action Agency, which offers emergency shelter programs and other assistance.

Christine Seibert, Adult Services coordinator, said her office works with individuals and agencies that encounter homeless people, including municipal officials, hospitals, police and social workers.

It is estimated that there are more than 700 homeless people in Delaware County. An annual count of homeless people will be conducted Wednesday by Adult Services and its partners in the Homeless Services Coalition.

“We are pleased to have dedicated partners in the community who help our Division of Adult Services address the issues of hunger and homelessness,” McGarrigle said.

Each year, the Office of Adult Services distributes an updated Emergency Shelter Directory to all police stations, municipalities, hospital emergency rooms and social service agencies. In addition, the office publishes a Survival Guide that details a variety of services from shelters to meals.

(more)

(Code Blue, add 2)

For people who are not homeless, but may encounter cold-weather difficulty if they can't afford to pay their heating bill, there are other resources, including the Community Action Agency, which has a utility assistance program. The Community Action Agency is the county's official anti-poverty agency assisting economically disadvantaged county residents.

People who are over age 60 and need assistance during a Code Blue can also contact the County Office of Services for the Aging (COSA) at (610) 490-1300. COSA Director Louis Colbert said COSA's case managers look in on elderly residents who might be vulnerable during extreme weather conditions.

"With more cold weather ahead of us, we want to ensure the health and safety of all of our residents," said Councilman McGarrigle. "We encourage people to check on neighbors, elderly friends and family members and pets during the winter months to ensure that they have enough heat and food to get through periods of bad weather."

* **For information** or to obtain a copy of the current Emergency Shelter Directory and Survival Guide, contact Christine Seibert at (610) 713-2115.

* **Resources** include:

Salvation Army: 151 W. 15th St., Chester. Call 610-874-0423

Connect: 133-135 Long Lane, Upper Darby. Call 610-352-1590.

Community Action Agency. Call 610-874-8451.

* For **winter safety tips** to avoid medical emergencies due to extreme temperatures, consult the Centers for Disease Control at <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/>



Helping those in need come in from the cold

Caption: Delaware County Councilman Thomas McGarrigle (second from left) highlights all of the services that help people in-need during extreme cold conditions, including programs that assist the homeless and elderly. Joining him to get the word out are, from left, Maureen Hennessey Herman, Director of the County Department of Intercommunity Health; Christine Seibert, administrator for the Office of Adult Services; and Louis Colbert, Director of the County Office of Services for the Aging.