

Cleanup Costs Jump

Caltrans Spends Almost Double on Homeless Encampments in 2015-16



Caltrans photos by Steven Hellon

District 3 maintenance crews and a Caltrans garbage truck are ready to clean up a homeless encampment in Sacramento. A typical cleanup process takes days, beginning with a notification posted at the site at least 72 hours prior to its start.

An estimated one-fifth of the nation's homeless population lives in California, mostly in large urban centers, and an increasing number are taking up residence on state highway system right-of-way, putting increased demand on Caltrans' maintenance operations.

Caltrans spent \$7.5 million in fiscal year 2015-16 — twice as much as it did just two years prior — cleaning up after the state's homeless population on its highway right-of-way.

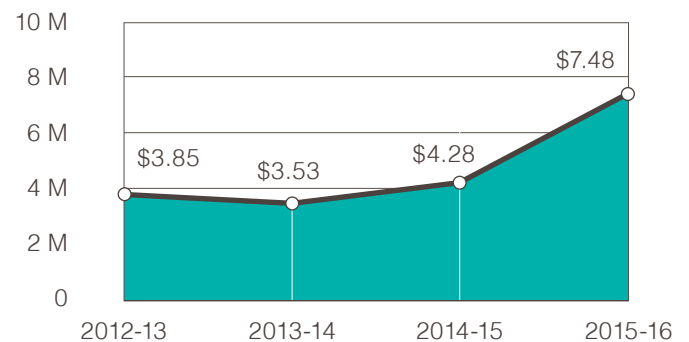
Homelessness is a national problem, but there are unique factors affecting California. In northeastern states like Maine or New York, for example, homeless people tend to stay in shelters, according to a report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. But in California, 7 in 10 homeless people fend for themselves on the street or, increasingly, along highways, which has the potential to damage highway infrastructure, create community blight and pose public health and safety risks.

Materials regularly found at the illegal encampments include human waste, spoiled food, animal carcasses, broken glass, toxic chemicals, hypoder-

mic needles and weapons. These items create hazards on the site, and can be carried by stormwater to streams and rivers, posing further environmental threats. Even relatively harmless items such as tents and tarps can present danger if strong winds blow them into the path of motorists.

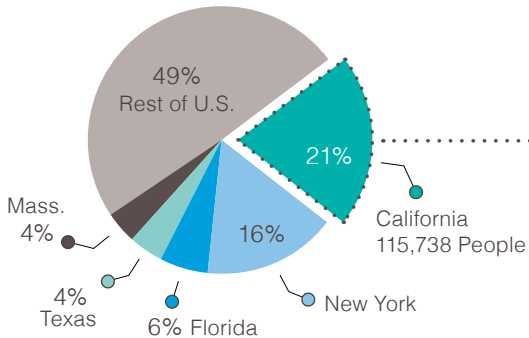
In some cases, inhabitants have tapped into electrical and irrigation lines or have stripped the wiring to sell the copper at scrap yards. This not only causes added expense for Caltrans — and state taxpayers —

Caltrans Homeless Encampment Cleanup Costs on the Rise (dollars in millions)

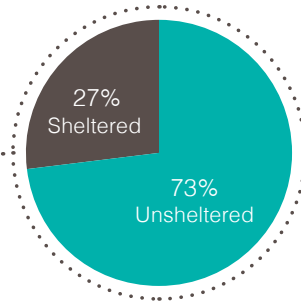


California Leads the Nation in Homeless Population

In January 2015, More Than Half of U.S. Homeless Population Lived in Five States



Almost Three-Fourths of California's Homeless are Unsheltered



States With Highest Rates of Unsheltered Homeless

73%	California
71%	Hawaii
58%	Montana
57%	Oregon
54%	Florida-

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development, November 2015

but also puts motorists at risk if lighting and other highway features go dark because of vandalized utilities.

In addition, illegal encampments often cause extensive damage to the right of way. Fires have been set inside bridge structures to keep inhabitants warm during the winter.

From fiscal year 2012-13 through 2015-16, Caltrans has cleared more than 10,700 illegal encampments at a cost of more than \$19 million. In the 2015-16 fiscal year alone, Caltrans participated in 2,531 cleanups.

A typical cleanup takes days, not hours, beginning with a notification posted at the site at least 72 hours prior to its start. Caltrans employees are accompanied by homeless advocates and at least one peace officer as advocates attempt to help the inhabitants find more suitable housing and other necessary services.

On the day of the cleanup, Caltrans workers are escorted by state or local law enforcement as they remove the litter, human waste, and a wide variety of personal items left behind despite the 72-hour notice. Caltrans workers label each item for storage at

maintenance facilities for at least 90 days. Unclaimed items are then disposed.

California continues to be refuge to more people without homes than any other state. On a single night in January 2015, according to the HUD report, more than half of the homeless population in the United States was in five states: California (21 percent, or 115,738 people), New York (16 percent, or 88,250 people), Florida (6 percent, or 35,900 people), Texas (4 percent, or 23,678 people), and Massachusetts (4 percent, or 21,135 people).

On a positive note, despite a slight rise in the state's homeless population in 2014-15, the most recent year for which numbers are available, the report says that California has 23,000 fewer homeless people than it did in 2007, representing the nation's biggest drop (16.7 percent) since the start of the Great Recession. **MM**

Source: Caltrans Division of Maintenance



Materials regularly found at illegal encampments, like this one at left, behind a sound wall in Sacramento, include human waste, spoiled food, animal carcasses, broken glass, toxic chemicals, hypodermic needles and weapons. At right, the same site after cleanup. Cleanups often involve picking up debris, as well as repairing damage to infrastructure.