



SMALL BUSINESS HOMELESSNESS TOOLKIT

SMALL BUSINESS HOMELESSNESS TOOLKIT & RESOURCES

Businesses play a significant role in practicing consistent and proper handling of issues related to homelessness and your business operations. By implementing consistent and responsible strategies, businesses can help mitigate challenges associated with homelessness that are impacting business operations.

One key step is education – informing business and property owners, tenants, and neighboring establishments about best practices to handle situations and prevent their reoccurrence. By taking an informed and solution-oriented approach, businesses contribute to safer, more welcoming business districts that benefit customers, employees, and the broader community alike.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TODAY:

- **Know your NPO:** To find out who your Neighborhood Police Officer (NPO) is, use the ["One Address" search tool](#). NPOs are dedicated to providing services to specific neighborhoods and/or designated geographic areas. They serve as a valuable resource by building relationships with area residents and business owners, understanding neighborhood-specific concerns, and working to reduce crime while promoting effective prevention strategies.
- **Give authority to tenants and business operators:** Property owners and tenants play a vital role in reducing the presence of people experiencing homelessness. Consider empowering tenants and businesses on your property by providing them with the authority to report individuals who are trespassing, loitering, or soliciting on the property. Ask your NPO about the Criminal Trespass Warning affidavit that transfers apparent authority to tenants to act on behalf of property owners when reporting a criminal trespass.
- **Provide "Notice" on your property regarding trespassing:** For Police to be able to respond in accordance with Texas Penal Code 30.05, "notice" must be given to the person committing the trespass. "Notice" can be any of the following:
 - A sign posted at or on the property stating loitering and trespassing is prohibited.
 - Oral or written communication by the owner or someone with apparent authority.
 - Fencing or enclosures designed to keep intruders out of the property.

Once any one, or a combination of, these actions are taken, police will respond accordingly when called and dispatched.

- **Download the My FW app:** The MyFW app is the official app for users to quickly and easily report issues to the City of Fort Worth. The app allows citizens to upload issues including unsanctioned homeless camps in real-time. When submitting an issue in MyFW, include a brief description, use the map-based location feature, and include pictures to give specific information about an incident. MyFW is available for download on the [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play Store](#).

- **Talk to your NPO about the Criminal Trespass Affidavit Program:** The Criminal Trespass Affidavit Program allows property owners or persons responsible for the property and the Fort Worth Police Department to work together to reduce criminal activities on private property. The program will authorize the Fort Worth Police Department to act on behalf of the property owner(s)/manager(s) to remove or arrest the individual(s) found on the property when not authorized. An individual arrested for trespassing will be charged with a violation of the Texas Penal Code Sec. 30.05, Criminal Trespass. The property owner/manager will be the person formally filing the criminal complaint against the violator(s).
 - A situation where this can be helpful is late at night when you are not at the property or your business is not open. If the police recognize or are alerted to an issue, they can respond and process trespassing warnings and arrests as necessary.
 - The Criminal Trespass Affidavit Program may not be appropriate for all properties. If you are interested in participating in the program, [contact your NPO](#) to learn more and discuss your options.

- **Call 911 when needed:** In the case of emergencies, always contact 911 to report real-time issues. The most common scenario we hear from businesses is individuals having a mental health episode, never hesitate to call 911 in this situation.

- **Know the exact locations and descriptions of events occurring:** You may be asked to take a photo of the incident. Examples of times you should call 911 include:
 - Endangered people
 - Mental health crisis
 - Public Threat
 - Refusal to leave the property after “notice” is given
 - Suspicious or lewd behaviors
 - Life or death situations

HOW CAN I HELP?

DO:

- Get to know your NPO and share information with them about what's happening in the area. [Find your NPO here on the City's One Address page.](#)
- Talk with your NPO about filing a Criminal Trespass Warning Affidavit with the FWPD area command.
- Keep the areas around your business clean and well maintained, including trimming trees and general upkeep of landscaping.
- Make sure all lights work properly, including entrances, alcoves, and covered spaces.
- Lock dumpsters and other containers to prohibit access.
- Have password protection on your Wi-Fi.
- Secure external-facing utilities. Make sure there are no exposed functional electrical outlets on the exterior of your building. If you have a water spigot on the exterior of your building, consider an [inexpensive solution like a hose key.](#)
- [Register your security cameras with FWPD.](#)
- Ensure your staff understands how to handle various situations related to the issue of homelessness.
- Stay informed about resources available to people experiencing homelessness.
- Contribute your time, skills, and resources to support organizations dedicated to assisting individuals experiencing homelessness.

DO NOT:

- Provide money, food, or other resources to people sleeping or loitering on or around your property.
 - Permit people to camp on your property.
 - Allow people to store personal belongings on your property.
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WHAT DO I DO...

- If someone is sleeping on my business property?
 - Ask the individual(s) to leave
 - If sleeping, avoid tapping or touching to wake them.
 - Tell the individual this space is for customers only and you need them to leave.
 - Let the individual(s) know the boundaries of the property.
 - If they refuse to leave or are doing something illegal, call 911 to report trespassing.

- If you have not already, install a “No Trespassing” sign and talk to your NPO about filing a Criminal Trespass Warning Affidavit with the FWPD area command.
- If a homeless camp has developed near my property?
 - Report via MyFW App.
- If someone disruptive has walked into my business?
 - Disruptive can be, but is not limited to, yelling, threatening yourself or others, throwing objects.
 - Try to de-escalate the situation if you are comfortable and able to do so safely.
 - Tell the individual this space is for customers only and you need them to leave.
 - If they refuse to leave or escalate their behavior, FWPD considers this behavior a disturbance. Call 911.
 - If it appears this is a mental health episode or crisis, call 911 and share that observation.
- If someone is using my business property as a public restroom or to shower?
 - Tell the individual this space is for customers only and you need them to leave.
 - If they refuse to leave or escalate their behavior, FWPD considers this behavior a disturbance. Call 911.
 - If it appears this is a mental health episode or crisis, call 911 and share that observation.
 - If you have not already, install “No Public Restroom” signs.
- If people are rummaging through the dumpster on my property?
 - Lock your dumpster/dumpster enclosure on non-collection days.
- If someone appears to be suffering from a mental health episode or crisis?
 - Call 911.
 - Observed behaviors can be, but are not limited to, threatening body language, nudity, being covered in urine or feces, indiscriminate yelling, physical distress or wounds, intoxication or under the influence.
- If someone is asking customers and/or employees to buy meals or request money?
 - **§ 30-16 AGGRESSIVE PANHANDLING OR SOLICITATION** states that no person may solicit, ask, beg or panhandle on private property or residential property without permission from the owner or occupant.
 - Tell the individual this space is for customers only and you need them to leave.
 - If they refuse to leave or escalate their behavior, FWPD considers this behavior a disturbance. Call 911.
- If you’re not sure what to do, call 911!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This toolkit is designed to equip the business community with the knowledge and strategies needed to minimize the impact of homelessness on their operations. By implementing these best practices, businesses can contribute to a safer, more welcoming environment for their employees, customers, and the broader Fort Worth community.

The development of this toolkit would not have been possible without the dedicated collaboration of the Fort Worth Chamber's Homelessness Task Force, the City of Fort Worth, and the Fort Worth Police Department. Their combined expertise as business owners, nonprofit leaders, city staff, police department leaders, and neighborhood police officers has led to the creation of this resource.

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