

Critical Infrastructure safety risks due to continuous homeless encampment fires at Transportation Divisions 1 and 2.

Over the last year, SSLE and Operations staff have documented approximately 30 tent/rubbish fires started from homeless encampments and Recreational Vehicles/Campers (RVs) adjacent to Metro Transportation Divisions 1 and 2. The encampments are located adjacent to areas which house Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) Metro buses, large hazardous materials tanks, containers which contain motor oil, antifreeze, flammable cleaning solvents, and fuel dispensing facilities. Several of the fires at the locations have come within 300 feet of these facilities. Division management at both Divisions have expressed grave concerns regarding these ongoing fires and the serious potential for an environmental disaster, great bodily injury to Metro employees, severe damage to critical infrastructure, and adjoining neighborhood should any of these hazardous material facilities be reached by a fire from the adjacent homeless encampments or RVs.

On February 4, 2021, the Los Angeles Fire Department Office of the Fire Marshal conducted a walkthrough inspection of both Divisions to assess the fire safety risk to both facilities. In the report, the Fire Marshal indicated, in part, that "Based on the numerous amount of previous fires, repeated carelessness regarding fire safety by the individuals occupying tents, the potential ignition of stored Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), Hazardous Material Tanks and Containers along with the number of CNG Transit Buses that may be parked/stored all at one time in the yard, there should be conformity of the most restrictive Fire Code Requirements regarding safer distance modifications to homeless tents and RVs and to alleviate future unwanted ignition."

In addition to critical infrastructure safety concerns, there is also serious concern over the safety of our employees at these locations. Metro employees at Division 1 must traverse on foot through homeless encampments to travel from the main building to the parking lot (6th Street and Central Avenue). Many employees have been victims of harassment and assaults. In order to avoid walking near the encampments, many employees choose to walk in the middle of the street, often putting their lives at risk. Employee vehicles are regularly subject to vandalism, theft, and employees find their vehicles were used to dispose of human waste, syringes and other hazardous waste. On January 27, 2021, an encampment fire at this location caused severe fire damage to three employee vehicles.

At Division 2, Metro employees must constantly remove syringes and other hazardous waste that are thrown over the wall from encampments along 15th St and onto Division property. Employees do not feel safe walking along 16th St due to a large amount of RVs parked along the street, especially at night, when there is ongoing criminal activity adjacent to the RVs. Additionally, employees are harassed by and have objects thrown at them from unhoused individuals along 16th St.

In an effort to mitigate this ongoing situation and find long term solutions to address the homeless encampments adjacent to Divisions 1 and 2, SSLE staff has held several meetings with the Mayor's Office for City Homelessness Initiatives, Council District 14, Unified Homelessness Response Center, Sanitation Bureau, LADOT, LAPD, and LAFD. However, these meetings have not resulted in any successful plan for addressing the ongoing risks at Divisions 1 & 2 in part because of the City's moratorium on LAMC 56.11 which does not allow for encampment removals or relocation.

Next Steps

SSLE staff has identified the following steps to attempt to mitigate the ongoing homeless encampment fire concerns at Divisions 1 and 2, while the moratorium on LAMC 56.11 remains in place,

- As recommended by the LAFD Fire Marshall, LAPD Transit Services HOPE Officers distributed Fire Safety Flyers to unhoused individuals in tents and RV's along Industrial Street at Division 1 and along 15th and 16th Street at Division 2.
- As a result of the City opening a "Bridge Housing" location at 14th St and Paloma St, Division 2 is within the Special Enforcement Zone which requires the Sanitation Bureau to regularly pick up trash and enforce ADA compliance on encampment within that zone. SSLE staff will work with UHRC and Sanitation to coordinate regular clean-ups on 15th and 16th St. to ensure guidelines are being adhered to.
- SSLE staff will coordinate with LAPD Transit Services HOPE Team, UHRC, and Sanitation to ensure ongoing outreach and ADA enforcement takes place on the days after CARE Team clean-ups.
- SSLE staff will work with PATH outreach services to create an outreach plan for Divisions 1 and 2 in an effort to find housing options for unhoused individuals in encampments adjacent to the high fire risk areas.
- Metro Facilities Engineering is working with the City's Bureau of Engineering to move forward on a permanent Street Vacation on Industrial Street east of Central Avenue at Division 1. The Street Vacation would allow Metro to expand the division property to Central Av. Facilities Engineering is currently identifying funding for this project.
- SSLE staff will work with CD14 to identify housing options for unhoused individuals in RVs parked along 16th St, between San Pedro St and Griffith Av. If individuals are successfully housed, CD14 will consider "red curbing" 16th Street to address public safety concerns.
- SSLE staff will work with LAFD Officer of the Fire Marshall to do a second walkthrough of Divisions 1 and 2 to identify additional safety measures or recommendations that can be taken to reduce the risk of fires from homeless encampments.