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MnDOT closes Cedar-Riverside homeless encampment in Minneapolis

Occupants estimate there were roughly 200 people living at the Minneapolis tent city when it was closed Wednesday morning.

By Susan Du (<https://www.startribune.com/susan-du/6370761/>) Star Tribune |

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With a day's notice to vacate, the homeless occupants of the Samatar Crossing encampment in Minneapolis' Cedar-Riverside neighborhood packed their belongings in garbage bags and evacuated the snowy clearing overlooking Interstate 94 where many had lived for months.

The encampment was located on Minnesota Department of Transportation land adjacent to Currie Park and the Cedar-Riverside light-rail station. The lack of bathroom facilities caused [hygiene issues \(https://www.startribune.com/homeless-camp-residents-in-cedar-riverside-find-local-governments-shifting-responsibility-for-them/600237296/?refresh=true\)](https://www.startribune.com/homeless-camp-residents-in-cedar-riverside-find-local-governments-shifting-responsibility-for-them/600237296/?refresh=true) for weeks.

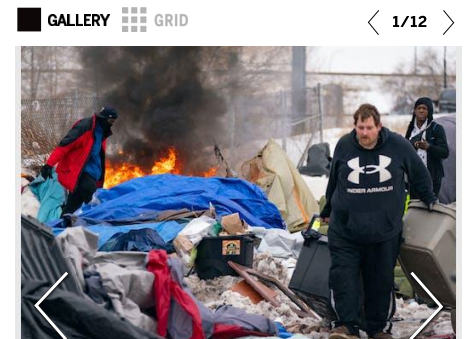
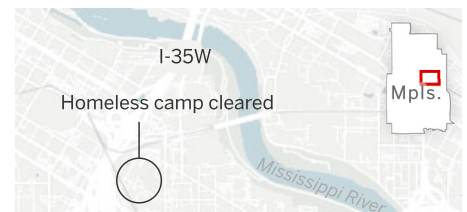
Then on Jan. 12, 27-year-old Adnan Mohamed Ali was shot to death inside the encampment, prompting City Council Member Jamal Osman to [demand \(https://www.startribune.com/shooting-leaves-one-dead-at-cedar-riverside-homeless-encampment/600242999/\)](https://www.startribune.com/shooting-leaves-one-dead-at-cedar-riverside-homeless-encampment/600242999/) the state work with the city to close it immediately.

MnDOT staff handed out flyers on Tuesday warning camp occupants to leave by 9 a.m. the next day.


"This location had become a critical safety concern following a fatal shooting late last week," said MnDOT spokesman Jake Loesch in a statement. "Over the past several weeks, there have been regular visits to this location from service providers and local organizations — including weekly by Hennepin County's Streets to Housing team — to share information about available services and shelters."

As state troopers stood guard, people scrambled to pack their possessions and figure out their next moves. Contractors milled through the camp, taking down tents and collecting needles. Street outreach workers with Community Medical Services, Metro Youth Diversion Center and the Family Partnership helped collect propane tanks and drive people to their next destinations if they had one in mind. Many didn't, gathering in the doorways of commercial buildings across the street and piling their bags on a nearby light-rail platform.

Outreach workers said they anticipated people would try to move to an encampment at Lake Street and Hiawatha Avenue.



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 Gallery: A tent catches fire as volunteers, workers and residents take down and clean up a homeless encampment Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2023, in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis.

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One outreach worker helped Katie Bunker, who had been living at the camp with her partner since September, fill out a housing assessment Wednesday morning. She was at a loss, though, of what to do while waiting for a bed to open up in an emergency shelter.

Bunker said Ali, the man killed last week, was a friend of hers. She said she wasn't mad about MnDOT closing the camp in reaction to the shooting, but disappointed over how the tent she'd just paid \$160 for was torn in the process of people rushing to help take it down.

"I don't know where to go from here. Do we just go to another snowbank?" Bunker said. "We try to do what we can with what we've got. Now we've just got a bag on [her partner's] back."

The closure Wednesday was a collaboration between MnDOT, the city of Minneapolis, Metro Transit and the State Patrol. Volunteers were permitted to help people pack, and there was no organized resistance. One protester who attempted to sit down in the path of construction equipment was arrested and accused of striking a state trooper in the face. One tent caught fire while it was being crushed.

County outreach workers and nonprofit community partners have frequented the camp since mid-October, logging about 300 service hours collectively, said Erin Wixsten, principal planning analyst with Hennepin County Housing Stability. She said the county's Streets to Housing team spent at least six hours each week engaging with residents, while Healthcare for the Homeless offered medical assistance, wound care and harm reduction.

Burhan Israfael, a Cedar-Riverside community organizer, dropped by the closure Wednesday to try and find a number of his childhood friends who had been living there. The camp had a sizable population of young people in their 20s and 30s struggling with addiction, he said.

"Honestly, it's a complex issue. But to the extent they have resources, it says a lot about the state right now because they can flood this place with a bunch of resources that can help people individually and as a community," Israfael said. "How did we allow things to get like this?"

Anyone who is experiencing homelessness can call Hennepin Shelter Hotline at 612-204-8200, or Adult Shelter Connect at 612-248-2350. Shelter beds open up throughout the day. According to Wixsten, there were 48 open spots through Adult Shelter Connect at 11 a.m. Wednesday.

Susan Du covers the city of Minneapolis for the Star Tribune.

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