



**Council Direction:**

**Information:**

*OUR Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.*  
*OUR Mission: WE provide quality public service that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.*  
*OUR Values: Accountability, Cost Consciousness, Equity, Excellence, Honesty, Innovation, Leadership, Respect and Teamwork.*

The Hamilton Community and Emergency Services Department (CES) is an integral stakeholder in providing a response to cold alerts in the City. CES staff members facilitate and provide leadership to a response group called the Hamilton Community Cold/Heat Response Group. Members of the group include:

- The Salvation Army;
- Hamilton Crisis Outreach And Support Team (COAST);
- Good Shepherd Homes;
- Youth Outreach Hamilton;
- Staff from CES (Residential Care Facility & Hostels; EMS Paramedics);
- Staff from PHS (Mental Health Street Outreach Services; Health Hazards);
- Staff from Public Works (PW - Facilities); and
- Hamilton Police Services

In urban environments, most cases of hypothermia are caused by homelessness, mental illness, or drug and/or alcohol misuse. The stakeholders identified within the response group protocol (see “Appendix A”) are prepared to identify high-risk persons in need and provide services to reduce risk of health impacts due to cold weather. Appendix B to this report provides a list of Emergency Shelters that are available for those at-risk to seek shelter during a cold alert. If a bed is not readily available at a specific shelter, the shelter staff consult with other shelters within the network to attempt to find accommodation. If there are no beds available within the shelter network, CES staff are contacted and consulted to identify a solution for accommodating the at-risk person(s). Historically, no individual has ever been denied accommodation to a warm place to stay at night during a cold alert in Hamilton, through the shelter network.

### **Emergency Response vs. Cold Alert Response:**

It is worth noting the difference between providing shelter to individuals and families during an ‘Emergency Response’ versus providing shelter during a ‘Cold Alert’ response. As described above, the Cold Alert response first uses a network of Hamilton shelters to find overnight accommodation for at-risk individuals. This practice differs from situations where accommodation may be required for individuals that may be unable to stay within their place of residence due to an emergency. An example of this would be a situation where vital services are unavailable for the residence and the occupants will need to find suitable accommodation until the emergency conditions are resolved. In the event of an emergency response for sheltering, CES staff is notified of the need for emergency sheltering and options for accommodating the affected individuals are assessed to determine the most appropriate level of response. On the small end of the response continuum, actions may include facilitating affected individuals to stay with family members or friends, to large response actions that may include opening municipal buildings that can be used as suitable evacuation centres.

### **Preparing for Winter:**

Members of the Hamilton Community Cold/Heat Response Group will be meeting in late October to review the operations and actions from the 2014/2015 winter season in order to identify opportunities to strengthen the extreme cold weather protocol for the approaching 2015/2016 winter season.

One of the agenda items to be discussed at the October meeting will be to develop plans for strengthening the network of community “friendly places” that can act as “heating” or “warming” centres during daytime hours. Ideal locations for this type of use include various City facilities, such as recreation centres, libraries, and former municipal buildings. Although it is understood that these buildings already offer refuge from hazardous weather during times of Heat Alerts, their role within a response during times of a Cold Alert could be more explicit.

In addition to identifying suitable and strategic locations that are inviting to the public during periods when a Cold Alert is in effect, members of the Hamilton Community Cold/Heat Response Group will also plan to discuss response actions that can be taken in response to cold weather during “pre-cold alert” conditions (i.e. cold weather, but Cold Alert conditions not reached).

### **Summary**

The City of Hamilton has a strong coalition of City departments and community organizations (Hamilton Community Cold/Heat Response Group) to assist vulnerable persons during Cold Alerts. Work by the group will continue to ensure access to warm places during times of cold weather.

### **Appendices/Schedules Attached**

Appendix A to Report BOH15013 – Extreme Cold Weather Protocol

Appendix B to Report BOH15013 – Listing of Emergency Shelters open during a Cold Alert in the City of Hamilton