As Temperatures Dive, City Enacts Another 'Code Blue' for Homeless

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By Mirela Iverac : Reporter, WNYC News

Homeless New Yorkers stay warm riding the subway as a polar vortex as the city is plunged into dangerously low temperatures. (Stephen Nessen/WNYC)

New York City officials used a cold weather emergency procedure, known as code blue, over the weekend to try to protect New Yorkers who are at greatest risk — the homeless who live on the streets.

The city declares code blue when the temperature drops to 32 degrees or lower. Efforts to get the homeless off the streets and into shelters are doubled, with 20 teams on the city’s streets and subways.

Scott Auwarter, assistant executive director at BronxWorks, a non-profit which has a contract with the city to provide outreach services in the Bronx, said his teams keep a careful eye on 20 to 30 spots where the homeless regularly congregate.

“Traditionally in the Bronx people lived under the Bruckner Expressway, but we've had people living in certain spots under the Cross Bronx Expressway and near bridges that go into Manhattan,” he said.

A spokesman for the Department of Homeless services said they moved more than 20 people off the streets over the weekend. An estimated 3,300 New Yorkers live on the streets and other public spaces, according to city estimates from last year. (The city’s latest count — conducted earlier this month — is still pending).

Patrick Markee of the Coalition for the Homeless said the street homeless are extremely vulnerable when the temperatures are as low as they have been over the past few days.

“There’s some folks who might be a risk to themselves on the street or because of psychiatric impairment or some other serious health or mental health problem they might not recognize the risk factors that are out there, and we need to make sure that those folks are getting the help that they can,” he said.

http://www.wnyc.org/story/code-blue/