



CAMPING ALONG STATE HIGHWAYS

Camping along state highways is unsafe for campers and highway users and is illegal.

Illegal camping can also create environmental hazards, cause wildfires and interfere with ODOT's ability to safely maintain the state highway system, including roads, bridges, vegetation and bicycle and pedestrian paths.

Illegal camping often takes over space that should be available to the public for transportation purposes. Illegal camping can also create a hostile and unhealthy atmosphere for the public and cause safety issues including dirty needles, trash and human waste.

ODOT responds to public concerns about camping along state highways. The department's efforts respect the circumstances of the campers and the concerns of neighbors while following state law.

In the 12 months ending July 1, 2018, ODOT spent about \$1.8 million statewide cleaning illegal campsites, nearly double the previous year.

Crews in the Portland area collect an average of 63 tons of trash from illegal campsites every month.

In 2017, ODOT posted notices on 778 occasions in the Portland area where personal property needed to be removed.

ODOT employs 3 full-time crews and a private contractor to help clean illegal campsites in the Portland area.

People found camping along state highways are often homeless.

This causes ODOT to address issues that have little to do with transportation and requires partnerships with local governments, law enforcement, and social services.

- ODOT is the custodian of the state highway system. Keeping that property safely maintained and available for transportation purposes is ODOT's primary responsibility.
- ODOT coordinates with law enforcement agencies when we encounter camping, trespassing and other illegal activities on state highway right-of-way.
- Campers along state highways often face complex issues involving health care, housing, families, mental health and many other social problems. ODOT relies on local governments and social service agencies equipped to offer the necessary assistance.

State laws and binding legal agreements guide ODOT in how it deals with personal belongings from illegal camping found on the state highway right-of-way.

- This includes **posting notices before personal property is removed by ODOT**. The agreements specify what the posted notices must say, and how ODOT catalogs and stores personal belongings left behind.
- In areas closed to the public, **ODOT posts notices at least 24 hours before crews remove personal belongings**.
- In areas not closed to the public but where illegal camping occurs, **ODOT posts notices no less than 10 days before ODOT picks up abandoned personal belongings**.
- **ODOT may ask campers to collect their belongings and leave**. The department is not a law enforcement agency and cannot force campers to leave, but many voluntarily leave when asked.
- **Police agencies often accompany ODOT crews** and use their authority to make sure the public property is cleared.
- In extreme winter weather, ODOT crews are usually focused on other priorities and not typically able to address illegal camping in a timely manner. **Camping next to a highway is especially dangerous when icy and snowy roads increase the likelihood of a vehicle leaving the road.**
- **During hot and dry summers, illegal camping significantly increases the threat of wildfires**. In the summer of 2018, numerous small wildfires started in illegal camps, creating a danger to nearby residents, to people driving, walking and riding bicycles, and to the campers themselves.

ODOT works hard to maintain a safe, secure and effective transportation system for everyone. Citizens who feel threatened or believe illegal activities are occurring on the state highway right-of-way should contact law enforcement.

