

Shelter: More than 560,000 people lived on the streets or in shelters in the U.S. this year

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But the program is struggling to find hosts in time for their January start goal.

"To a lot of people it sounds scary, especially when they don't know who they'd be hosting," Strehlow said. "We have the resources lined up, we just need the buildings."

Two churches have agreed to host the shelter two nights a week. Strehlow said if others don't join, she's worried the program won't get off the ground.

The county has historically responded to homelessness by helping people leave town, Strehlow said. People are driven to shelters in Oregon, directed to Longview, or temporarily put up in a hotel.

"But for some people, their lives are here," Strehlow said. "People shouldn't have to leave their homes to survive."

Seen through conflicting numbers

State numbers show fewer people are living without housing, while Long Beach police officers have seen more reports related to homelessness.

More than 560,000 people lived on the streets or in shelters in the U.S. this year, according to figures released by the Department of Housing and Urban Development last week. That's a drop of 2 percent.

Washington's 2015 Point in Time report stated there are 149 people in Pacific County without a place to live, down from last year's 207.

However, Long Beach



Pastor Jim Stender from St. Andrew Lutheran Church talks with Pacific County community members about his congregation's experience in hosting a winter homeless shelter for 13 years. 'This has brought many challenges, but it's also brought a new awareness and unity among our community,' he said.

police documents show that more than 50 percent of all reports of homeless people trespassing on private property occurred in the last two years. From 1999 to 2013, reports averaged less than two a year. In 2014, there were 10. There have been 19 this year, as of November.

Over the summer, rumors spread that another county was delivering transient communities to the peninsula. However, Wright said he never found any proof or reason to believe that's true.

"I don't know what's

changed," Wright said. "Our area just doesn't make sense as a place to stay if you're homeless."

Miles separate public restrooms, some of which are often locked. There are no public showers on the Peninsula and there has never been a shelter.

There are, however, eight food banks throughout the year in Pacific County. Non-profits host consistent clothing drives and housing organizations support people struggling to pay rent.

The community is car-

ing, but that doesn't change the fact there's no place for people to find shelter, Long Beach Police Chief Flint Wright said.

Joining forces

Peninsula Poverty Response Vice-Chairman Dick Wallace said it is hard to see the issue of homelessness through numbers.

"I don't know if the county's population of homeless is growing, or if people are just getting better at recognizing it," he said.

Homelessness includes

people living in their cars, in structures without basic amenities like water or crashing on friends' couches. Part of the benefit of a shelter is getting those unknown numbers in the door and connected to county resources, Wallace said.

Strehlow, who is also pastor of Ocean Park Lutheran Church, said Overnight Winter Lodging formed a task force to develop shelter rules and safety policy.

"We're not just a bunch of philanthropists who want to be walked all over," she said. "We're asking for this to be a partnership between the county, churches, volunteers and the people getting help."

The task force received a grant from the county to afford guest background checks, facility liability insurance and to hire a shelter coordinator. Peninsula Poverty Response raised \$6,000 for initial shelter supplies.

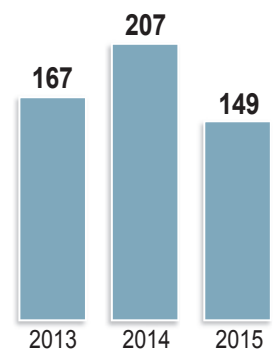
The group met with the county sheriff and Long Beach Police to make sure they have safety measures in place.

Chief Wright said Peninsula Poverty Response needs to train volunteers to call the police if they feel uncomfortable. He said service-minded people often wait too long to call for help when issues begin.

"Part of me says I don't want them to do it, because the nature of what they're dealing with could be dangerous," he said. "But, they haven't gone into this naive and I know there needs to be some solution for people in need. Maybe this program needs to be tried."

Pacific County homelessness

The number of homeless people in Pacific County declined 28 percent in 2015 from a year ago, according to Washington's 2015 Point in Time report.

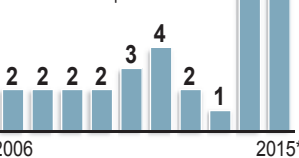


Source: Wash. State Dept. of Commerce
EO Media Group graphic

Long Beach homeless reports on the rise

Incidents involving homeless people trying to make camp on private land.

Source: Long Beach Police Department
*As of Nov. 18
Katheryn Houghton and Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group



He said if it doesn't work, the community can stop.

Strehlow said many community members have said they're worried a shelter may draw more homeless people to the peninsula.

"People sleeping next to each other on church floors won't make it 'fun' to be homeless on the beach in the winter," Strehlow said. "It will make it more tolerable for those who are already here."

The Blob: It has been around for two years and could continue

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learned that events far from the Oregon Coast, such as El Niño from the equator and currents traveling from Alaska and California, have the most impact.

A good or bad fishing season depends on the current. Cold currents produce fat copepods — small crustaceans — that have hibernated to survive while warm currents produce skinner ones that are not as nutritious for salmon.

The Blob

In 2013, the Aleutian Low, a low-pressure center located near the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, failed to develop and the upwelling season that helps replace warmer waters was among the shortest on record, Peterson said. There were no winter storms, so the water didn't mix, resulting in warmer temperatures and what scientists call the Blob.

In January 2014, the water was 3 degrees Celsius higher than usual. The Blob was 1.5 degrees warmer than anything recorded before.

"The Blob is an anomaly," Peterson said.

In September 2014, he recorded a 7-degree change in six hours off the coast of Newport. It was the Blob "coming onto the beach."

With El Niño, scientists normally see more species along the coast. But the Blob pro-

duced twice the typical number, with 11 unusual offshore species identified in northwest waters. Sunfish were seen in Cannon Beach and the Gulf of Alaska, a swordfish was found near Depoe Bay and a sea snake was discovered off the California coast.

The number of species from areas such as Fiji and Japan was the "most ever seen," Peterson said.

The impacts

Scientists suspect that the Blob played a huge role in the seabird die-off in late 2014, at which time tens of thousands of Cassin's auklets were found dead along the Pacific coast. Beginning in August of this year, murrelets started dying off.

"We have had very high dead bird counts on the North Coast these past three or four months," said Haystack Rock Awareness Program Coordinator Melissa Keyser.

She noted they counted 129 deceased birds on the mile of beach in front of Haystack Rock from August through October.

The Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team has reported 3,985 dead murrelets along the West Coast so far this

year, compared to 1,880 last year.

With warmer waters, prey have dived deeper and the birds can't get to them, Peterson said.

Humpback whales came into the Columbia River and closer to Haystack Rock looking for food because of the changes, as well.

The Blob has been around for two years and could continue, potentially meaning more poor salmon returns and bird deaths.

"It could be a nightmare," Peterson said. "I'm a little con-

cerned about it, but I can't do much about it except tell people to be aware of it."

Warming waters aren't actually anything new, he added. They have been happening since 1998, so instead of ignoring it, people should "worry about it right now."

There is yet another player in the environmental headaches: the toxic algae bloom.

Toxic bloom

Toxic algae blooms can cause paralytic shellfish poisoning. The shellfish don't get

sick, but the mammals that eat them, including sea lions and humans, can. Death is rare but can occur.

This year produced the widest toxic bloom on record, possibly due to the warmer waters, prompting razor clam closures on the West Coast. It is affecting Dungeness crabs now for the first time, Peterson said. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife delayed the opening of crab season because of higher toxin levels in Southern Oregon.

"This particular year is very poisonous," Peterson said.

It could have a huge economic impact on the fishing industry.

Scientists are searching for answers to the anomalies, but Peterson questions what surprises wait next.

In the meantime, El Niño is set to hit this winter, expected to bring warmer than average conditions and below average precipitation to Oregon, according to the Seasonal Climate Forecast.

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