



City of Arts & Innovation

News Release

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Contact:

Phil Pitchford

Public Information Officer

951-826-5975

ppitchford@riversideca.gov

Riverside Prohibits Camping in Santa Ana River Bottom, Other Fire-Prone Areas

Ordinance approved by City Council Tuesday evening likely will take effect in early October

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Camping and storing property in fire-prone areas like the Santa Ana River bottom will be illegal according to a new ordinance approved Tuesday (8/2) by the Riverside City Council.

The ordinance makes it unlawful and a public nuisance to sit, lie, sleep, or store, use, maintain or place any bulky item or personal property in areas that would include, but not be limited to, homeless encampments in high fire areas, known as the wildland-urban interface.

The ordinance allows the City to immediately respond to a violation by removing bulky items, personal property, hazardous waste, infectious waste, discarded items, or debris; and by securing the perimeter of the property with fencing, gates or barricades.

“We have a humanitarian and environmental crisis in the river bottom,” Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson said. “This ordinance will help protect not just residents who have seen their homes threatened by dozens of fires in recent months, but also the people living in these fire-prone areas whose lives are at risk, while addressing impacts to wildlife and water quality. We owe it to everyone involved to reduce the danger and protect the river, and this ordinance helps us do that.”

The ordinance, approved by a 6-1 vote, will return for final approval on Sept. 6 and take effect 30 days later. Councilmember Clarissa Cervantes voted no, citing concerns whether the City has adequate shelter for people who would leave the river bottom.

Fire danger is especially acute in the wildland-urban interface, where houses are close to undeveloped wildland vegetation. That, in turn, places at risk the firefighters, police officers and outreach workers who enter the wildland-urban interface as part of their jobs. Risk is highest in the river bottom, at Hole Lake and at Sycamore Canyon, according to a city staff report.

During a survey in the summer/fall of 2021, the City found 52 homeless encampments in the wildland-urban interface, including 39 within the city limits.

The Riverside Fire Department has, during the past five years, responded to 163 vegetation fires in the river bottom; 12 in Sycamore Canyon; four in Hawarden Hills; and one in the La Sierra Hills, according to a city staff report. In 2021 alone, there were 42 fires in the river bottom; one fire in Hawarden Hills; three fires in Sycamore Canyon; and three fires in the Wildlife Preserve area.

City officials emphasized that the effort to reduce camping in fire-prone areas coincides with efforts to provide additional shelter beds through a half-dozen programs, as well as through tenant-based rental assistance and emergency rental assistance to assist individuals with obtaining housing.

“Riverside is doing more than any other city in our county to provide shelter and housing for people dealing with homelessness,” Mayor Pro Tem Ronaldo Fierro said. “This ordinance is part of a larger strategy to reduce risk in fire-prone areas while assisting people who currently are living in these dangerous conditions.”

More information can be found by clicking [here](#) and scrolling down to #26.

Discussion of the issue can be found at roughly the 5:14 mark of this [video](#).

For the latest information and resources regarding COVID-19 -- www.RiversideCA.gov/COVID-19