



WASHINGTON GORGE ACTION PROGRAMS

The Community Action Agency for Skamania and Klickitat Counties

P.O. Box 805, 115 W Steuben Street Bingen, WA 98605 509.493.3954 | 800.755.1192 | www.wagap.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Tammy Kaufman, Media Consultant

Organization: WAGAP

Phone: (509) 637-3340

Email: info@wagap.org

Shelters begin summer preparations for life-threatening weather events

WAGAP and MCCAC link area partners to support vulnerable populations

Stevenson, WA (June 29, 2022) - [Washington Gorge Action Programs \(WAGAP\)](#) is partnering with [Mid Columbia Community Action Council \(MCCAC\)](#) and other agencies and nonprofits to provide Emergency Cooling Shelters and relief from unhealthy air quality events for vulnerable populations during this summer's expected extreme conditions.

Coordinators are particularly concerned for the houseless community, the elderly, and those vulnerable to exposure due to a lack of access to air conditioning or airtight buildings. They want to offer shelter when extreme heat events and wildfire smoke hit the Columbia River Gorge and Mid-Columbia regions.

"When people don't have ways to escape extreme heat and smoke, life-threatening situations arise," said Curt Gray, Skamania County Housing Department Director for [WAGAP](#). "Everyone should take general precautions to drink water, get out of the sun, and cool down when temperatures rise. But houseless and vulnerable community members need extra assistance, and that's what our shelter is for," he added.

Gray shared that many factors come into play when the partners decide to open the Emergency Cooling Shelters. "Generally," Gray explained, "we'll be looking for the National Weather Service to issue an Excessive Heat Warning or unhealthy air quality advisory. But other regional factors will also be considered, such as the length of the event and whether or not temperatures cool off overnight."

Beginning July 1, 2022, Gorge and Mid-Columbia residents will have access to various resources.

In Washington:

- In Skamania County, [WAGAP](#)'s Emergency Cooling Shelter is located next to the Hegewald Center in Stevenson.
- In Klickitat County, partners include the City of White Salmon, which will provide an Emergency Cooling Shelter at the Fire Hall, and Father's House Fellowship in Goldendale.

In Oregon:

- In Hood River County, [MCCAC](#) will be operating from the Hood River Alliance Church as a primary location, with the Hood River Fire Department acting as a backup when the church is unavailable.
- In Wasco County, [MCCAC](#) will be operating from the St. Vincent DePaul Center.
- In Sherman County, call the Office of Emergency Management at 541-565-3100 to arrange assistance.

“It’s very tricky coordinating our bi-state region,” said Kelli Horvath, the Housing Stabilization Manager at [MCCAC](#). “Our agency’s coverage area alone spans Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman counties in Oregon, with a wide range of weather patterns.”

“Temperature and humidity swings can range widely from the west to the east in this region, so we have to plan for variations and be prepared to staff necessary sites when we see an Excessive Heat Warning or unhealthy air quality advisory,” said Horvath.

Horvath indicated the forecast might trigger the need for a shelter to open in one community but not another on any given day. To determine when to open emergency shelters, the group is using guidelines from the Oregon Health Authority for the definition of Excessive Heat Warning and guidelines from the Environmental Protection Agency for Unhealthy Air Quality.

When they open Emergency Cooling Shelters and provide relief from Unhealthy Air Quality, [WAGAP](#) and [MCCAC](#) will share banner notices at the top of their websites, <https://www.wagap.org/> and <https://www.mccac.com/> with a link to the most recent information, including location and hours of operation. They will also alert regional news outlets and share the information on social media. Residents are encouraged to check the websites at the start of each event for the most current shelter information.

Emergency Cooling Shelters will generally be open during the hottest parts of the day from approximately 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Teams will work with local emergency management and public health partners during smoke emergencies to provide relief from Unhealthy Air Quality conditions.

At times it is not quite hot enough for shelters to be activated, [WAGAP](#) and [MCCAC](#) will be doing outreach to vulnerable populations. This will include distributing water and other critical supplies as available.

Staffing the shelters is always a challenge. Anyone interested in volunteering should contact [WAGAP](#) at 509-281-1129 or [MCCAC](#) at 541-298-5131 ext. 200 for more information.

Learn more about “Understanding Heat Advisories” from the Oregon Health Authority at <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/DiseasesConditions/CommunicableDisease/PreparednessSurveillanceEpidemiology/Documents/understandha.pdf>. This includes a [Heat Index](#) chart which helps to show the relationship between temperature and humidity levels.

Learn more about the Air Quality Index at <https://www.airnow.gov/aqi/aqi-basics/> and Protection from Wildfire Smoke at <https://osha.oregon.gov/OSHARules/adopted/2022/ao4-2022-text-smoke-exposure.pdf>.

###

Washington Gorge Action Programs (WAGAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit Community Action Agency that helps individuals, families, and communities. WAGAP addresses basic human needs, including food, shelter, energy assistance, and more, in Skamania and Klickitat Counties. For more than 50 years, WAGAP has helped people help themselves and reach self-sufficiency. Learn more at wagap.org, or contact WAGAP at (509) 493-2662 or info@wagap.org.

MCCAC is the Community Action Agency serving Hood River, Wasco and Sherman Counties. MCCAC’s mission is to build a better future for our community through partnership and equity-centered programs that prevent and eliminate poverty and homelessness