

WINK News - Southwest Florida

Cleaning Charlotte County's estimated 100+ homeless camps

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PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. - It's estimated Charlotte County has more than 100 homeless camps. Officials have been battling this problem for long enough and want them cleaned up once and for all.

It's not the homeless that officials have a problem with, it's the vagrants - those leaving empty liquor bottles, needles and garbage all over these camps. Old laws have made it difficult for them clean these areas, but they may soon take different route.

In November, we brought you the story of Port Charlotte neighbors scared to go outside. Their neighborhood had become part of the county's estimated 100-plus vagrant homeless camps. "I was threatened that my home would be burned and spray painted and windows broke," a neighbor said.

Last month, the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office cleared out a few of these camps. What they found was astounding: thousands of pounds of mattresses, beer cans, syringes, and makeshift toilets. We checked today and found that areas with "no trespassing" signs remain clear. Those without them, are once again, filled with trash.

"The Sheriff's Department is kind of stuck because they have to get written permission from the landowner to go in and get rid of the trespassers which doesn't make much sense," Commissioner Bob Starr said.

To get past that, Starr says the next step is to team up with the Health Department. "The conditions there are putrid," Starr said. "If that's the situation, then the Health Department has the authority to clean those up to protect everyone in the county."

With or without permission. "Once we get the sites cleaned up, let's see if maybe that encourages the people living in them to get a room or move somewhere else."

Starr says it's not about targeting one segment of the population. It's about providing a safe environment for everyone. He says if there are any homeless families who truly want help, contact him, and he'll do everything he can to get them into a shelter.

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