

# ODOT, advocates to work together

## Agency cleared homeless camp

**Jonathan Bach** Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The state agency that cleared an east Salem homeless camp right before a critical annual homeless count last week wants to coordinate future sweeps with homeless advocates.

The Oregon Department of Transportation cleared a homeless camp under an Oregon 22 bridge days before the annual Point-in-Time count, when advocates attempt to tally the region's homeless population.

The count, which advocates conducted Wednesday, helps local social service agencies procure federal dollars for homeless programs. By federal mandate, the counts happen each year across the United States near the end of January.

After the Statesman Journal reported on the east Salem sweep, ODOT Director Matthew Garrett sent a memo to agency employees throughout Oregon, assuring them officials in Salem worked within state law and followed the agency's standard procedures.

"However, after taking the action it came to light that we moved people immediately before an annual count of homeless individuals, making it difficult for homeless service providers to complete an accurate count," Garrett said.

He said ODOT officials need to make sure they coordinate with area homeless services providers before posting signs warning of the impending cleanup and removing peoples' belongings, so their timing doesn't cause "unanticipated issues." It will also give social service agencies the chance to help those affected by the cleanup, he said.

Jon Reeves, whose agency coordinated the homeless count, called the statement "positive."

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Salem Police Officer Bob Owings surveys what's left of a homeless camp under the Highway 22 overpass that crosses Mill Creek near Costco and Lowe's on Jan. 29. MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

## ODOT

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To me, that is a testament to the fact that they are understanding of the situation," said Reeves, executive director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community

Action Agency in Salem.

He hopes the statement can be seen as a guiding light for future partnerships between officials and advocates.

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