

Portland in a Storm: A Case Study of Confronting the Human Impacts of Abrupt Climate Change

Global Research News Hour Episode 169

By [Michael Welch](#)

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"The growing homelessness emergency represents a humanitarian crisis and I view it as a moral imperative that we make treating it a top priority. We cannot call ourselves a progressive community while so many people are living - and dying - on our streets...This unfolding crisis is not only catastrophic for people impacted by homelessness, but it also directly impacts our community's livability, public health and safety, and our economy." - Ted Wheeler, mayoral candidate, February 2016 [1]

"People think that the caste system is only in India, and we have our own caste system. And the lowest, the bottom of the caste system are the people who live on the streets." - Mimi German, from this week's interview

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According to the Weather Channel, Portland, Oregon, may well be America's most winter-fatigued city for the 2016-2017 season.[2]

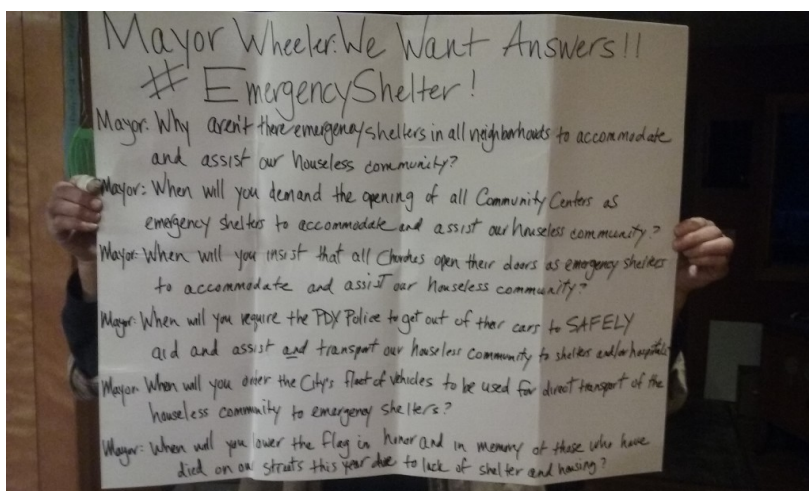
During the period from December 8th to January 17th, five winter storms have buffeted the city resulting in power outages, tree damage, and closed highways. A particularly intense storm starting January 10 dumped 15.5 inches of snow on the metro area, prompting newly installed Mayor Ted Wheeler to declare a State of Emergency the following day.[3][4][5]

Portland, on average, experiences two days each winter with snow cover of 1 inch or more. [6]

Reinforcing the hardship faced by city residents is the unusually cold temperatures. The Weather Channel documents that the first 18 days of January, and all but 7 days between December 4th and January 31st, were colder than average.[7]

These weather conditions have taken a disproportionate toll on the city's houseless population. Four people died of exposure in the first ten days of 2017, and an infant who perished within hours of its birth to a houseless mother, is likewise suspected of having

been impacted by the harsh cold. [8]



A handful of city residents have stepped up to do what they can to assist this most vulnerable population. While some admirable initiatives have been undertaken, community members have reported on Mayor Wheeler's failure to act urgently to confront the situation. They are pressing a number of urgent demands, chief among these being opening up emergency warming shelters.

One roadblock after another compelled Portland citizens to take desperate actions to get the Mayor to confront the crisis. The following video documents the January 25th [shut down of Portland City Hall](#), which took place immediately after [a memorial for the death of the houseless Portland infant](#).

Mimi German, the woman depicted above, happens to be a past guest of this program. A self-described Earth Activist, and founder of radcast.org with a history of involvement with the anti-nuclear movement, she is also a poet, and has been among those leading the charge in taking action to address the immediate needs of street-involved people abandoned to the elements.

In this week's feature interview, German outlines how and why the city has failed to address the crisis appropriately, political indifference and denial, what can and should be done, and lessons in store for the broader population of the United States as they confront the human impacts of abrupt climate disruption, earthquakes and other looming natural disasters.

Bleeding On The Backs Of The Broken - a poem by Mimi German:

Standing in power on the backs of the broken
feigning shock and awe
the fifth class lies beneath your feet
under bridges, their stench a sewer's scent,
the filth upon which these women stood,
blood dripping from their pussy snark,
down their legs to the street to the curb to the bridge to the edge
down on to restless scabbing bodies of the huddled masses below,
on lowlife, the lepers, the polluted, the meek,
the wretched refuse
the undone, the poor, the are-they-still-here, the outcasts,
the exiled, the downtrodden, the unknowns, the unnamed,

the homeless
the anonymous, the uncared for, the unloved,
the addicts, the whores, the mentally ill
yearning to breathe free
the untouched, the unwound, the wounded,
the disparaged, the threatened, the abused, the torn
the tired, the poor
the traumatized, the swept, the broken,
all drowning in the blood of one million women
whose calls for respect and intersectionality
rang hollow on the walls beneath the bridge
while dripping blood on the floor of the forgotten.

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[Updates: As of February 4th, the Office of Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler has not responded to this reporter's February 1st request for comment. On February 2nd, hours after our interview with Mimi German, Portland City Council [adopted an emergency ordinance](#) requiring landlords to pay the moving costs of tenants they evict without cause. The vote was unanimous. – MAW]

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Caper Radio CJBW 107.3FM in Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia airs the Global Research News Hour starting Wednesday Morning from 8:00 to 9:00am. Find more details at www.caperradio.ca

Notes:

1) <http://www.tedwheeler.com/ted-wheeler-outlines-comprehensive-approach-to-addressing-homelessness/>

2) <https://weather.com/storms/winter/news/portland-oregon-worst-winter-city-2016-2017>

3) http://www.oregonlive.com/roadreport/index.ssf/2017/01/portland_metro_wednesday_traff_98.html

4) <https://weather.com/storms/winter/news/portland-oregon-worst-winter-city-2016-2017>

5) Sophia June (January 11, 2017), "Gov. Kate Brown and Mayor Ted Wheeler Declare State of Emergency After Portland Gets a Foot of Snowfall in a Day", Willamette Week; <http://www.wweek.com/news/2017/01/11/oregon-gov-kate-brown-and-portland-mayor-ted-wheeler-declare-state-of-emergency-after-foot-of-snowfall-in-a-day/>

6) <https://weather.com/storms/winter/news/portland-oregon-worst-winter-city-2016-2017>

7) *ibid*

8) Nigel Jaquiss (January 16, 2017), "A Baby is Dead After Being Found With His Homeless Mother at a Portland Bus Stop", Willamette Week; <http://www.wweek.com/news/city/2017/01/16/a-baby-is-dead-after-being-found-with-his-homeless-mother-at-a-portland-bus-stop/>

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