

# Media Release

## Safety and security challenges for CERA staff in the Residential Red Zone

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Tourists using bedrooms as toilets and post-settlement bonfires are just some of the challenges faced by Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority staff tasked with keeping an eye on Crown-owned properties in the Residential Red Zone.

With over 3,000 properties yet to be cleared in the red zone, CERA staff have a big job in ensuring the properties are maintained until all insurance-related assessments are completed, and demolition or relocation can get underway.

CERA chief executive Roger Sutton says while the majority of the issues are run-of-the-mill, some of the work the security staff needs to do beggars belief.

We have long been using motion-sensor security cameras on many properties, and that initiative alone has assisted with numerous criminal investigations. But it has got to the point where we decided staff needed to keep a video record of some of their encounters in case that could also assist police," Mr Sutton says.

Recent events have seen CERA staff discover tourists setting up camp inside a Crown-owned home, with their tent pitched in the lounge and a BBQ set up for cooking beside it.

"That may well have been a misunderstanding, but the behavior of the group to then use one of the bedrooms as a toilet was inexplicable. It caused a health risk to my staff, but in general is just disgusting behaviour and not something we would want other tourists to think was acceptable anywhere in New Zealand."

Snippets of three recent incidents CERA staff have encountered have been released today to give an example of the scenarios.

As well as the indoor-camping issue, staff recently checked out a situation where former property owners had been paid out for their property by the Crown, but nearby residents had heard that a large "farewell bonfire" was being planned for the house.

The video footage shows the CERA staff asking the former home owner about information circulating on social media.

In a third scenario captured on film, CERA staff are called to check a Crown-owned home which neighbours fear has been broken into. A check with Armourguard staff shows this is not the case, and the neighbours were able to be reassured.

Mr Sutton says the reassurance component is a key part of the work CERA staff carry out in the red zone.

"There are obviously many people living right next door to the red zone areas and they need to feel safe and secure. So we do everything we can to reassure them that we are keeping an eye on the properties, and any potential bad behaviour in the general area.

"Since the first residents began moving out of the red zone, we have worked closely with the Fire Service and Police to manage the workload jointly."

Mr Sutton says there is still a need to reiterate that settled properties in the red zone are Crown-owned – not abandoned.

"It's not a free-for-all for anyone to use or destroy them, and we need to make sure we work through the insurance issues and EQC issues before properties are demolished or relocated, so that the tax-payer gets the best value out of the money being spent."

"My team works hard to do that and, as the video shows, the circumstances they work in can be very challenging."

Mr Sutton says the level of assistance for people still living in the red zone is also a huge part of the security and reassurance role, sometimes with unusual requirements.

In the recent flood one CERA staff member helped carry a paraplegic man to bed, when his caregiver was stranded outside the area by flood waters. The resident had been alone for two days and was uncomfortable in his chair.

"My staff are willing and able to help where and when they can, and I am very glad to have staff on board who genuinely care about making people feel safe, regardless of the challenges that brings."

<https://youtu.be/IEFUDrO2b1c>