



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Costly Housing Forces Some to Live in Vehicles

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From VOA Learning English, this is the Health & Lifestyle report.

In February of 2020, the United Nations Commission for Social Development created their first resolution on homelessness. The resolution said homelessness has become a worldwide problem and a “serious violation of human **dignity**.”

It affects “people of all ages from all walks of life, in both developed and developing countries.” The U.N. adds that 1.6 billion people worldwide live in poor housing conditions. And UN-Habitat has noted a worrying rise in homelessness around the world in the last 10 years. Young people are the age group with the highest risk of becoming homeless.

In some parts of the United States, there is a growing type of homelessness. People living in a vehicle instead of a house or **apartment** is becoming more common. It is called “vehicle homelessness.”

During the pandemic, many people lost their jobs and their homes. There is also a lack of **affordable** housing and housing supply, in general. As a result, **RVs**, campers, and other vehicles have appeared in local campgrounds, store parking lots, and neighborhood streets. It is especially problematic in areas with very high housing costs.

The problem became so serious in Seattle, Washington, that the state’s supreme court had to step in.

The Associated Press reported on August 12 that Washington's Supreme Court issued a decision that helps protect people living in their vehicles from having them **towed**. This decision comes from a case that gave a lot of attention to Seattle's housing crisis.

The justices held that it was "unconstitutionally" extreme for the city of Seattle to **impound** a homeless man's truck and require him to pay the nearly \$550 costs to get it back. The court also ruled that vehicles that people live in are homes and cannot be taken from them and sold to pay their debts.

Staying in one area all summer and over-staying camping limits is a problem with many popular camping areas in the U.S. The environmental cost comes in the form of human waste dumped on the land, trees and plants destroyed, and burnable wood being used up when campfires are allowed.

Reporters for the Associated Press recently looked more closely at the issue in two towns in the western part of the U.S. -- Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Bozeman, Montana.

Bozeman, Montana

While there has been an increase in the number of people living out of their vehicles across the United States, it is new to Bozeman, Montana. That is what Heather Grenier, the CEO of Human Resources Development Council (or, HRDC), recently told the Bozeman Daily Chronicle.

Grenier explained that during the pandemic many people in Bozeman lost their homes. So, now in Bozeman, there is an increase in vehicle homelessness. HRDC found that the majority of people living in their vehicles are working more than one job." Many lost their homes.

Megan Metzger runs a campground at Bear Canyon near Bozeman. She said the campground's month-to-month RV **lots** sell quickly. Many people living at the campground work in Bozeman, Metzger said, including travel nurses.

Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Some people are living in vehicles in and around some of the most beautiful national parks in the United States. Jackson Hole, Wyoming, is close to two very popular national parks: Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park.

Most of the land in Jackson Hole is a national park or under some type of federal protection. So, there is little land for building new homes and very little affordable housing.

Some employers in Jackson Hole have pushed employees toward the national park when housing became hard to find.

Linda Merigliano is the Wilderness & Recreation Program Manager for Wyoming's Bridger Teton National Forest. "We can't just use the national forest as the bedroom for employers to house their **staff**," she said. "That (is) not what the national forest is about."

Erica Robertson has been living out of her car since graduating from college in 2020. She lives mostly in the Jackson Hole area, where she can see the Teton mountains. She plans to live in her car until winter makes car life unsafe.

"If I could find housing," Robertson said, "I probably would have done that."

And that's the Health & Lifestyle report. I'm Anna Matteo.

Associated Press writers Nora Shelly and Gene Johnson reported on this story. Anna Matteo adapted it for VOA Learning English. Susan Shand was the editor.

Words in This Story

dignity – *n.* the quality or state of being worthy of honor and respect

apartment – *n.* a usually rented room or set of rooms that is part of a building and is used as a place to live

affordable – *adj.* within someone's ability to pay : reasonably priced

RV – *n.* recreational vehicle, such as a camper or motorhome

tow – *v.* to pull (a vehicle) behind another vehicle with a rope or chain : *Sentence example:*
The police towed my car because it was parked illegally.

impound – *v.* to seize and hold in the custody of the law

recreational – *adj.* done for enjoyment

camper – *n.* a type of vehicle or special trailer that people can live and sleep in when they are traveling or camping

lot – *n.* a piece or plot of land

staff – *n.* a group of people who work for an organization or business
