



Safe Park Indy FAQs

How does the program work?

Safe Park Indy works with businesses and organizations that have empty parking lots overnight; these lots become our safe parking lots. People living in their cars due to homelessness can then park in these lots and get a good night's rest, access our hygiene and food items, access device charging stations and free Wifi, get connected to social services, receive a gym membership to access shower facilities, and find dignity and support in the lot community. The safe parking model has been used around the country for more than 20 years as an urgently-needed crisis response to homelessness; Safe Park Indy is the first and so far only safe parking organization in the state.

People living in their cars due to homelessness can apply for a spot in our lot [via our website](#). The application process involves a background check and an intake interview. Clients are required to sign a code of conduct that outlines expectations and rules in the safe parking lot. Clients with a violent criminal history and/or those on the sex offender registry list will not be admitted into the program. Clients must attest they have a valid registration and driver's license, and their vehicles must be operable. We do not accept RVs, trailers, campers or buses.

Once accepted, clients are given the location of the lot(s). (Locations are not made public to avoid unknown individuals from parking in the lots.) Clients are given a parking pass to display in their windshield while they're parking so that law enforcement is aware they are authorized to be there and knows they aren't trespassing.

Clients must check into the lot between the hours of 6pm and 8pm (late check-on can be arranged if needed) and must leave the lot by 7:00 a.m. During check-in hours, and again from 6-7 am, clients can access indoor restrooms; a conference room that serves as a community space for them to relax, eat, work or charge devices; access free Wifi, and help themselves to hygiene amenity kits and snack bags. After check-in hours, clients can use the deluxe porta-potty featuring a flushing toilet and a sink in the parking lot. Quiet hours are observed between 10pm and 5 am.

Safe Park Indy does not provide case management. Rather, we utilize the [CHIP Handbook of Help](#) to refer clients to relevant organizations for case management and other resources.

How long can clients stay in the lot?

Clients may stay a maximum of 60 days, at which time they must exit the program and sit out one month before reapplying again.

[Who won't you accept into the program?](#)

Clients with a violent criminal history and/or those on the sex offender registry list will not be admitted into the program. Clients must attest they have a valid registration and driver's license, and their vehicles must be operable. We do not accept RVs, trailers, campers or buses. At the moment, we do not accept children, though that may change in the future.

[I need a place to park now. How long does it take to get approved?](#)

The process itself is quick and can be done same-day, however we are operating on a waitlist. We encourage you to apply to the program to get your name on the waitlist so that as spots open up, you will be notified.

[Where is the lot?](#)

To protect the privacy and safety of our clients, we don't disclose the lot location. The location is given to clients once they are admitted into the program. Generally speaking, it's on the northeast side of Indianapolis.

[Won't word get out about the lot location? What happens if people start parking there who aren't clients?](#)

Our clients sign a code of conduct agreeing to not share the lot location. If unauthorized vehicles park in the lot, they will be asked to leave. If they don't leave, they will be handled like any other trespasser and law enforcement will be called.

[How can I help out?](#)

We are entirely volunteer-run and we rely on community support to keep our program going. You can [learn more about volunteering here](#), or [donate here](#). You can also [shop our Amazon list](#) to donate supplies. Please check our website and social media frequently for additional volunteer opportunities. We also are urgently looking for additional lots. If you know of a business, organization or place of worship with a parking lot going unused overnight, please contact us at safeparkindy@gmail.com and let's talk about what it means to be a lot host!

[How can I start a safe parking lot in my community?](#)

As a starting point, we suggest purchasing the [Safe Parking Program Manual](#), published by New Beginning Counseling Center (one of the first safe parking programs in the country). We also recommend reading the [Smart Practices for Safe Parking review, published by the Center for Homeless Inquiries](#). We regret that due to capacity we cannot meet with folks individually who would like our advice about starting a program, but we may be able to present to large groups/organizations.

[Are there other safe parking organizations in Indiana?](#)

Not that we are aware of – however, you can check <https://vehicleresidency.org/resources/safe-parking-programs/> for a continually updated national list.

[Are you associated with a government agency or another nonprofit/shelter?](#)

No. We are an independent organization.

[Who is your leadership? Are you hiring?](#)

We are run entirely by volunteers. Our Board of Directors [can be found here](#).

[Do you accept donations of items?](#)

We accept donations of travel-size hygiene products, including:

- Shampoo and conditioner
- Body wash
- Bar soap
- Razors and shaving cream
- Deodorant
- Toothbrushes, toothpaste, mouthwash and floss
- Pads and tampons
- Laundry detergent
- Gift cards to fast food/casual restaurants (Subway, McDonald's, etc.) of \$25
- Gas gift cards of \$25

At this time we do not accept donations of clothing. Please contact us if there's something else you'd like to donate that isn't on this list, or to arrange pickup/drop off of donations.

[How are you funded?](#)

We are funded by generous individual donors, corporate donors, and grants. To donate, visit:

<https://donorbox.org/safe-parking-indy-phase-1-launch>

[Are you a faith-based/religious organization?](#)

No.

[Do you accept LGBTQ folks?](#)

Absolutely. All clients are welcome to apply, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, race, ethnicity or other characteristics.

[Can more than one person be in a car?](#)

Yes. You can have as many people in the car as there are seats. For example, if your car has five seats, you can have five people. Everyone must submit their own application and undergo their own background check.

[Is there a cost to clients?](#)

No. All of our services are always free.

Are the lots open in extreme weather?

For everyone's safety, we close the lots in extreme heat, cold and tornadic weather and instead urge people to use city shelters.

Are you going to expand?

We hope to expand around Indianapolis to meet the enormous need and we're urgently looking for additional lots. If you know of a business, organization or place of worship with a parking lot going unused overnight, please contact us at safeparkindy@gmail.com and let's talk about what it means to be a lot host!

Do you accept families with children?

We do not currently accept clients under the age of 18. This may change in the future.

Do you have a flyer I can print out/pass around?

Yes! Please [find our flyer here](#).

I'm a social service organization. Can I refer folks to you? How?

Yes! Please have them fill out the application [on the website](#). We are first come, first served and we operate off a waitlist.

Do you accept pets?

Yes! Pets must be leashed any time they aren't in the vehicle, and pets are not allowed inside the host building.

How do you keep the lot safe?

Safety and security is our top priority. If we don't have a safe lot, we can't exist as a program. We keep the lot safe in a variety of ways:

- Lot locations are kept private to avoid the general public from using them. We do not release the location of or name of the host lot.
- All clients are background checked. We deny any client with a violent offense, an open warrant, or those on the sex offender registry.
- Clients must attest that they have a valid driver's license, insurance and registration.
- Clients sign a Code of Conduct; breaking these rules results in removal from the program.
- We keep client numbers low; initially, our lot will only serve 5 cars at a time.
- Clients are asked to display a numbered parking pass so we can easily tell who is authorized to be in the lot.
- We have strict rules against weapons and drug and alcohol use and possession .
- Limited hours, bans on buses/campers/RVs and a rule against setting up any kind of outdoor structure prevent the risk of an encampment situation.
- We carry our own liability insurance.

The safe parking model has been successfully used across the country for more than 20 years. Lots have historically brought very little risk with them and in fact data suggests they have reduced calls to law enforcement and improved neighborhood safety.

Can you tell me more about being a lot host? Do the lot hosts have to pay anything? Do we have to run the program?

We literally wouldn't exist without our wonderful lot hosts, and we need more! Any business, organization or place of worship with an empty parking lot overnight can be a great lot host. Here's a bit more about lot host duties:

- **Required:** Provide at least 10 spots for vehicles to park.
- **Required:** Agree to welcome any approved guest regardless of faith, ethnicity and race, sexual orientation/gender identity, and family makeup.
- **Required:** Provide a space for a porta potty.
- Ideally, but not required: Provide indoor restroom access and an area to charge electronic devices during designated hours (such as 6pm - 8pm, for example).
- Optional: Provide volunteers and supplies for the guests, including food and clothing drives, serving meals, activities for children, etc.
- Optional: Become a Safe Park Indy donor.

Safe Park Indy covers all associated costs; lot hosts do not need to pay for anything for the program. We also carry our own liability insurance and provide the staffing/volunteers needed to run the program. Lot locations are never disclosed to the public, and locations are only given to clients who have been approved for the program. If you're interested in being a lot host and would like to learn more, or would like to talk to a current lot host to ask questions about their experience, please email us at safeparkindy@gmail.com.

Where can I find a list of other safe parking programs across the country?

Check out <https://vehicleresidency.org/resources/safe-parking-programs/>.

Is this program open to people traveling on a road trip, or people who choose to live in their cars?

No. We only serve clients living in their cars due to homelessness, and who are actively interested in and looking for indoor shelter.

How does this help the root cause of homelessness? It doesn't seem like the solution is letting people sleep in parking lots.

You're right – safe parking is NOT the solution to the homelessness crisis, and it's not an ideal situation. The solution is affordable housing and a living wage. However, while our society works on long term solutions, we know there are people sleeping in their cars every night in Indiana, and shelters are full. Safe Park Indy is an urgently needed crisis and harm reduction response.

Won't this just encourage people to live in their cars and not find long term housing?

No. Living in a car – even with the support of a safe parking lot – is not easy or enjoyable. (Try it for just one night and you'll never want to do it again!) We work to connect clients with social services so they can begin their journey toward indoor housing.

How many people are living in their cars in Indianapolis?

We don't know because it's impossible to track. People living in their cars often intentionally hide – and hide well – to avoid being targeted by criminals. Many report driving all night until they're

too tired to drive anymore, and then pulling into a store parking lot to sleep for an hour before driving some more. Many folks keep their situation a secret from their friends, family and coworkers. Some experts estimate that more than 100,000 people are homeless and living in their cars across the country, but the true number is unknown. We know the need is huge.

[Aren't you concerned this will just turn into a parking lot full of drug users?](#)

Unfortunately, people still believe the homeless person stereotype of a drug-using, binge drinking criminal. Sure, some folks experiencing homelessness may struggle with addiction or past incarcerations – but lots of wealthy professionals experience those struggles too. Many of our clients are working full-time, many have bachelor's degrees, and several even have masters degrees. These are people like you and me who had a series of unfortunate financial crises that led to a tough situation. We do have a code of conduct all clients must follow, and that includes not using drugs, alcohol or tobacco products in the lot, nor can clients be under the influence of drugs or alcohol while in the lot.

[What rules do clients need to follow?](#)

Our Code of Conduct is below.

- All people in the vehicle will undergo a background check and will not be accepted into the program if they have a history of violent or sexual crimes, or active warrants.
- We do not accept walk-in clients, and you may not bring in additional people in your car who have not been screened and approved to the program.
- Everyone in the vehicle must have a seat in the vehicle (for example, if your vehicle has four seats, you can have no more than four people).
- All pets must be leashed when out of the vehicle. Pet waste must be picked up and disposed of in the dumpster. Pets are not allowed inside the building.
- Clients may not cook in the vehicle or in the lot, nor have open flames of any kind.
- Clients may not bring guns onto the property.
- Clients will not bring a camper, bus, trailer or RV onto the property, or erect any kind of shelter/tent outside of their vehicles.
- Client words and actions will be respectful, threat/intimidation and violence-free, and absent of discrimination/bias.
- Clients can stay a maximum of 60 days. At that time, they must exit the program for one month before entering the program again.
- Clients will park only in the reserved spaces, leaving at least one empty space between each car.
- Clients must display the Safe Park Indy sign in their car window while parked. Clients will let Safe Park Indy know if they no longer need their spot and will return the parking pass at that time.
- There is a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol and drugs, including use and abuse of prescription medicine that is not assigned to the client, in the Host Lot and Host Building.
- Clients who are believed to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol will not be permitted into the lot.
- Absolutely no smoking or vaping in the Host Lot or Building.

- Quiet hours (between 10pm and 5 am) are to be strictly observed. Noise should be kept to a minimum and kept inside the vehicle – no loud music, technology, loud talking/shouting, outside playing, etc. Clients are to be inside their vehicle during quiet hours unless using the restroom.
- Clients can access the inside of the building between 6pm and 8pm, and again from 6 am to 7 am. Please leave all inside spaces tidy and treat them with respect.
- Do not share your building access code with anyone.
- Do not share the address/location of the lot with anyone.
- Car repairs and maintenance are not allowed to be conducted in the lot without prior permission from Safe Park Indy and the lot host.
- Clients must check into the lot between 6pm and 8pm and must leave by the designated check-out time of 7am. Safe Park Indy reserves the right to tow vehicles that are left in the lot outside of these hours or vehicles that become inoperable or are abandoned.
- Clients should leave the lot clean, disposing of all trash/unwanted items in appropriate trash cans.
- Clients may not leave items behind/store items in the lot or Host building.
- Clients must agree to use the carbon monoxide detectors in their vehicles, provided by Safe Park Indy, during their time in the lot.
- Safe Park Indy may close the lot if weather conditions are unsafe, including extreme heat, cold, snow or storms. We will make every attempt to notify clients if the lot must close for the night, as well as post closed signs in the lot.
- Safe Park Indy does not provide overnight security. Clients are asked to report any suspicious or criminal behavior to 911 immediately and call the Safe Park staff member on call after emergency services, once it is safe to do so. We do ask IMPD to conduct drive-by patrols to ensure client safety.
- While every effort is made to ensure safety and security, parking with Safe Park Indy is at your own risk.
- Clients will bring any problems to the attention of my Safe Park Indy contact.
- Clients will abide by any additional rules the lot host has while inside their property.