

Salem News You Don't Get in *The Salem News*

213 Incidents involving homeless individuals in one month, August 1-31, 2026

Police responses are down by 22 for August. This is welcome news. But as more unhoused individuals spend more time outside in summer weather, we have seen our public spaces full of folks congregating—camping out, sleeping, getting high, drinking, and panhandling. A tourist from Chicago posted a video on TikTok in which she noted unhoused people “screaming at each other, screaming at cars going by, calling them swear words when they didn’t get money. It was very intense, and I was pretty anxious just walking around.” Yes, we know the feeling.

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Downtown is a mess. Is it too much to ask that the people who are leaving their nips, needles, cigarette butts, and food trash clean up after themselves? Take some of that drug money and buy a box of trashbags. Show at least some responsibility!

In Maine, Portland’s mayor, Mark Dion, is confronting a similar situation, but he’s trying to make a difference in his city. “It’s uncomfortable for some people to hear it, but if we don’t confront the situation, it’s only going to get worse.” Dominic, are you listening?

87 Medical Aid Responses

As I noted last month, because homeless people do not have primary care physicians, all medical responses start out as emergencies, often requiring a full 911 complement of police, fire, and EMT resources. This is the most expensive way to treat illness. We are seeing another trend as well: unhoused people walking into the Salem Police headquarters on Margin Street to seek help directly. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that Lifebridge and Riley Plaza are close by. Among the responses were one to an overdose and another to suicidal person.

. 55 Responses to the Lifebridge area

22 to Lifebridge
14 to Riley Plaza
10 to the Salem Police Department
5 to Margin Street
4 to the Salem Post Office

. 17 Responses to Downtown locations

2 to Charlotte Forten Park on Derby Street
2 to Dunkin Donuts on Washington Street

One each:

CVS on Essex Street
Derby Wharf
Howling Wolf Taqueria on Derby Street
King’s Roast Beef on North Street
Mandeas Pizza on Essex Street
McDonald’s on Canal Street
Passage to India Restaurant on Washington Street
Salem District Court
Salem House of Pizza on Endicott Street
Salem Liquors on Essex Street
Speedway on Derby Street
Steve’s Market on Margin Street
Waite & Pierce store on Derby Street

. 9 Responses to redacted addresses

2 on Essex Street

One each:

Broad Street
 Chestnut Street
 Derby Street
 Dodge Street
 Federal Street
 Jefferson Avenue
 St. Peter Street

. 6 Responses to Highland Avenue

2 to Target
 One each:
 Broad Street Park
 Burger King
 M & T Bank on Traders Way
 A redacted address on Traders Way

29 Well-Being Checks

The police respond to calls about people who appear to be unwell, injured, or high. Responses may be via cruiser or by officers on bike patrol.

. 17 responses to specific locations

2 to Lifebridge
 2 to Riley Plaza
One each:
 CVS on Essex Street
 Charlotte Forten Park on Derby Street
 Dunkin Donuts on Washington Street
 Flatbread Pizza on Derby Street
 Furlong Park on Bridge Street
 Lafayette Hotel
 Salem Common
 Salem Public Library
 Sea Level Oyster Bar on the Wharf
 Splaine Park on May Street
 Tabernacle Church on Washington Street
 Village Tavern on Essex Street
 Walgreens on Derby Street

. 12 Responses to redacted addresses

Bridge Street
 Canal Street
 Congress Street
 Derby/Hawthorne Streets
 Endicott Street
 Fowler/ N. Pine Streets
 Franklin Street
 Gedney Court
 Lynde Street
 Park Street
 Washington/Federal Streets
 Washington/New Derby Streets

63 Unwanted Presences

I've grouped three categories here—**Loitering**,

Suspicious Persons, and Trespassing—

because all involve people being where they were not invited. If a polite request by a homeowner or shopkeeper is ignored, or if the same people keep returning, the police are called. However, if you spend any time walking around Downtown, you know that loitering is an everyday occurrence.

. 43 Loitering Responses to specific locations

5 to Salem Post Office
 4 to Speedway on Derby Street
 4 to Witch City Mall on Essex Street
 3 to Charlotte Forten Park
 3 to Furlong Park on Franklin Street
 2 to High Street Playground
 2 to Lifebridge
 2 to Museum Place Garage

One each:

Bit Bar on Derby Street
 Broad Street Cemetery
 Crosby Market on Canal Street
 Derby Restaurant on Washington Street
 Destination Salem on Derby Street
 Dunkin Donuts on Canal Street
 Dunkin Donuts on Washington Street
 Hampton Inn on Washington Street
 Ledger Restaurant on Washington Street
 Life Alive Café on Essex Street
 McDonald's on Canal Street
 O'Neill's Pub on Washington Street
 Park Service Orientation Center on Derby Street
 Passage to India Restaurant on Washington Street
 Peabody Essex Museum
 Speedway on Derby Street
 Starbuck's on Canal Street
 Steve's Market on Margin Street

. 13 Responses to redacted addresses

3 to Derby Street
 2 to Washington Street

One each:

Canal Street
 Canal Street/Broadway
 Charter Street
 Essex Street
 Forrester Street
 Front Street
 Margin Street
 Webb Street

6 Suspicious Person

Artists Row
 Congress Street Bridge
 Hawthorne Commons on First Street
 Lafayette Park

Riley Plaza
Steve's Market on Margin Street

1 Trespasser

Washington Street

18 Responses to Breach of Peace

Disputes are typically verbal. **Fights** are physical. **Disturbances** disrupt the peace. There were also calls for **Noise and Keep the Peace**.

5 Disturbances

- . Leslie's Retreat Park on Bridge Street
- . McDonald's on Canal Street
- . Steve's Liquors on Norman Street
- . Redacted address on Broadway
- . Redacted address on Derby Street
- 1 **Dispute** at Steve's Liquors on Norman Street
- 1 **Fight** at Riley Plaza
- 1 **Keep the Peace** on Peabody Street
- 1 **Noise** complaint at Old Town Hall

Assault, Harassment, Threats up the violence quotient. There are also **Domestic Violations**, the specifics of which are unclear in the police report. Here's the breakdown:

3 Assaults

- . Redacted address on Broadway
- . Redacted address on Lafayette/Dodge Streets
- . Riley Plaza

3 Domestic violations

- . Advanced Auto Parts on Essex Street
- . Redacted address on Charter Street
- . Redacted address on Essex Street

2 Harassments

- . EW Hobbs in Salem Willows
- . Hotel Salem on Essex Street

1 **Threat** on Salem Green/Essex Street

3 Arrests

At Charlotte Forten Park on Derby Street
At Lappin Park across from City Hall
At a redacted address on Canal Street

2 Thefts

Thefts are down this month. From 11 incidents last month, there were two in August, but the news comes with a caveat: Lock your car.

- . Shoplifting at Target on Highland Avenue
- . B & E of a motor vehicle on Farrell Court

11 Individual Events

Specifics are incomplete, but police were called to address these events around town:

Animal control issue at Salem Common
Fraud/scam at Lifebridge
Hit and Run on Palmer Street
Lost and Found at Charter Street Cemetery
Missing adult on Pope Street
Parking complaint at Prestige Carwash on Canal
Pedestrian hit by bike on Norman Street
Police Information on Margin Street
Safekeeping item at Lafayette Park
Salem District Court
Suspicious item in Furlong Park

Contextualizing the information

As always, Medical Aid and Well Being Checks constituted the greatest number of police and emergency service responses. There were 116—almost four a day—in August. In part we can blame a healthcare system in which too many people fall through the cracks. But in a homeless community, there are the twin issues, often intertwined, of untreated mental illness and substance abuse.

If Lifebridge does not offer or push for treatment, people do not get better.

The numbers for loitering, whether on private or public property, remain fairly consistent: 63 police responses this month, 68 in July, 62 in June, 61 in April. It is clear there are more unhoused people in Salem than can be accommodated. This has to change. A larger Lifebridge will not necessarily accommodate more unhoused people, because many choose to avoid the facility entirely. The folks at Witch City Action are looking to step in by claiming public space for encampments (see story on Page 6). Let's clarify that private tents on public land deprive taxpaying citizens the opportunity to enjoy the land they have paid for.

Violence remains an issue. While most of it continues to be directed within the homeless community, it affects the quality of life in Salem. It's easy to say, "Well, keep away from fights or arguments," but when so much of our public space is now inhabited by unhoused people, it's not easy to avoid. How far out of our way can we go to avoid violence? Too many residents report feeling unsafe in the parks. Many are no longer taking or sending their kids to play, the High Street Playground being one example. And

although the city is trying to organize events in Charlotte Forten Park, that lovely space is ever less lovely as we see medical interventions, loitering, and arrests taking place there.

The Chicago tourist who expressed discomfort at the degree of verbal harassment and physical violence she encountered may have uncovered the *real* Haunted Happenings. A few more posts like this and Salem can kiss tourism goodbye.

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Voices from the Neighborhood

As Salem residents make their voices heard via social media, we begin to get a clearer picture of the scope of homeless activity. These reports were posted on *SeeClickFix* and *Facebook*, as well as arriving to me via email and in conversation.

Old Town Hall

Reported on August 23 in *SeeClickFix*: “Human feces in the alleyway next to Old Town Hall and the front door to my apartment.”

Broad Street Cemetery

This is a longtime haven for unhoused people to meet up, do drugs, have sex, and sleep. A recurring issue with the cemetery is the presence of fecal matter. The new twist as reported in *SeeClickFix* August 26: “Another adult diaper.” This is the second time the diaper issue was reported. I’ve spared you the photo that accompanied the post.

McIntire District

Reported to me on August 29: An owner returned home to find a homeless person charging an electric bike[!] and phone in the lobby of his building. The owner asked the man to leave, following up with a call to the police. “Once he saw me dialing, he left,” says the owner. The building does not abut the street. Adds the building resident who relayed the story, “This person had to have come into our building past a fence, and through a large parking lot, then go through a door to get into our vestibule to find our electric plugs.”

High Street Park

Reported on *SeeClickFix* on August 20: “I am writing to report a recurring issue at the children’s playground, located directly behind

Lifebridge. There is currently an encampment in the playground area. We frequently observe individuals sleeping, drinking, and using drugs in this space. Additionally, the area is consistently littered with hazardous debris, including broken glass and needles. This situation is unacceptable. The children of Salem deserve a clean, safe environment to play, free from illegal camping and dangerous waste. Not to mention how are we monitoring the activity of sex offenders. . . Do we need to witness a child being injured emotionally, physically, or sexually?”

Riley Plaza

Reported on *SeeClickFix* on August 20: “I am concerned for the unhoused—especially ones with mental health and addiction and violence issues—but I think it’s a disservice to them to just provide food, clothes, and housing but [offer them] nothing to do and no job requirements. They should at least be encouraged to clean up Riley Plaza.

“The tourists are the draw, because they [the homeless] can make serious money [even after] paying for booze, drugs, and necessities. Remember the homeless man who murdered someone last year? He hoarded \$5000+ in coins. I’ve talked to a few unhoused who come just for the season, including one who walked all the way from the Cape.

“I don’t agree with building up Lifebridge downtown . . . The homeless crisis is hard for local businesses, residents, and our children. I know there are no easy answers, but something needs to change, and soon.”

Shetland Park

From the *Witch City Action* Facebook page on September 3:

“You want homeless people to have a safe place to stay...in a tent within an encampment? Please don’t make camping sound innocent and sweet,” writes Joe Cultrera, a longtime cultural contributor to the city and an advocate for a balance between help for the homeless and respect for the neighborhoods impacted by the influx of homeless people.

“My office was at Shetland Park and I used to walk by the South River encampment every day. It was anything but safe. Open drug use, fights, and all the health issues associated with used needles, people pissing and shitting in public.

I eventually shifted my walking path through The Point because that was much safer.

"I'm not a sheltered Salemite. I lived in New York City for 30 years, beginning in the late 70's when it was a crumbling hellhole. I moved back to my hometown in 2007 and never expected I would be dealing with NYC issues without the perks of living in NYC. I'm not sure where you are from or how long you've been in Salem, but this is not what this city used to be like. Even before Urban Renewal made the downtown prettier, this was not a place with hundreds of homeless. We can thank Lifebridge for bringing us this industry, but we should blame ourselves for helping them foster and grow it.

"The current camping ordinance needs enforcing and reinforcing, not undercutting. And I say that as someone just as compassionate as you, but also someone less naive and more realistic.

"This issue won't get solved by making the homeless more comfortable in Salem but by relocating them to where they came from, as well as to the wealthier towns around us. Making the population manageable city by city, (and with federal and state assistance) will allow each place to create real housing and real services for their particular unhoused residents. But until such time, enough is enough in Salem."

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From *The Daily Item* on August 20:

Here's another building in Salem that has become a not-for profit: Centerboard on Norman Street (around the corner from Lifebridge). This one will house homeless families. The operating entity can afford to pay almost \$8 million for the property (see figure circled) but, as with Lifebridge, will not be paying taxes.

Address	Price	Buyer	Seller
30 JOHNSON ST	\$830,000	B: Adeleke Hassan	S: Ivelisse M Medina
17 KOSCIUSKO ST	\$651,500	B: Connor Craig	S: Scott M Moquin & Amy E Moquin
15 RUTH AVE	\$720,000	B: Christopher Macinnis & Kaylee Macinnis	S: Agape Holdings LLC
3 MARINERS WAY 136B	\$640,000	B: John B Dickenson	S: Allen Davis 2nd
7 MAY ST	\$611,000	B: George Athanasiadis	S: 7 May St Rt & Emmanuel
39 NORMAN ST	\$7,900,000	B: Centerboard Inc	S: 39 Norman Street LLC
401 LYNN FIELDS PK	\$1,000,000	B: Douglas Mich	S: 401 Lynnfells Michael Conlon
19 PINEHURST #	\$740,000	B: Michael R E	S: Aldina M Fa

A Tourist from Chicago



On a late-August visit to Salem, tourist *marymomo13* reported this on *TikTok*, August 31. (I have edited her comments for brevity): "Here's something influencers will not tell you about Salem that you should know before going: homeless people. It's a problem there. These people aren't just on the outskirts of the town, they are sitting next to the main shops on Essex Street . . . These people were screaming at each other, screaming at cars going by, calling them swear words when they didn't get money. It was very intense, and I was pretty anxious just walking around. Since it wasn't peak season, it was a little easier to give them a wide berth just to avoid any conflict . . .

"We found a lot of people hanging out in front of their City Hall I would recommend avoiding that area." [Ed: it was the Post Office, and she included video footage of Riley Plaza].

See for yourself:

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/2879269882446858>

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Gimme, Gimme, Gimme: Salem's Homeless Have a List of Demands

You've been working all day. Imagine coming home and finding cigarette butts, empty nip bottles, castoff drug paraphernalia, and food trash strewn about your back yard. Then you realize that half a dozen people have been camping there. Even more have been hanging out during the day while you've been at work. And what's that brown stuff under the porch? OMG, they've been relieving themselves, too.

You tell them to leave. Not only do they respond they're not going anywhere, they hand you a list of demands: You need to make your backyard as comfortable as possible for them. At your expense You need to provide them with a porta-potty, which you will have to pay to be emptied periodically. You also need to clean up after them, whether it be trash or old clothing or rain-soaked mattresses. At least you think it's rain. Forget trying to enjoy your backyard, these folks are not moving. Sure, the police can get them to move along, but they come right back.

If you don't like that arrangement, you must find them another place to live. They also want one-

on-one social service help and an office in your home so they can organize volunteers to help them get everything they need and want. Your salary just about pays your mortgage, property tax, state tax, federal tax, and basic living expenses. And now they want you to cover *their* expenses. And did I mention that almost all of them came here uninvited from out of town?

If this sounds like a bad dream, it's not. It's a living nightmare, courtesy of Witch City Action, a small coalition of homeless and homed people living in Salem. I've highlighted their main demands below, but you can read the whole thing online. Of course they are not moving into your backyard. They are moving into our collective backyard, the city itself.

If you are on Facebook, you can read their wish list—more a manifesto of demands—of what they want from Salem.

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100087343976214>

Otherwise, access their "Camping Ordinance Endorsements Form" from Google Drive:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfUwm-MpZaanTumJ32fk_vQcGqgbH2rC-HDsDrSBajTwkoTXQ/viewform

Let's start off by acknowledging that nobody likes to see homeless people suffer, and that we'd like to see Salem natives helped. However, let's also acknowledge that most of the homeless folks in Salem are here from elsewhere. Further, let's acknowledge that the people who would foot the bill for what Witch City is proposing are the working folks of Salem who pay property tax, state tax, federal tax, and if they are homeowners, mortgages that include a hefty interest.

These are the salient demands:

. The Witch City folks want to camp out on city property with the amenities of paid camping. Their words: "Sanctioned campsite means the geographical area designated by the city for 24-hour authorized camping, including trash can, trash pickup, portable toilets, fire extinguishers, and offers of shelter, harm reduction, and detox resources equitable to the population of unhoused people staying there."

Subtext: We have come to your city uninvited. Now take care of us.

. "Any individual moved from an unsanctioned campsite must be provided storage, and transportation to a sanctioned campsite, or long-term shelter at the individual's discretion."

Subtext: We are dictating the terms of our homelessness.

. They want the police to "be responsible for maintaining a daily update list of available shelter beds within a 15-mile radius, along with locations for showers and food services."

Subtext: Let's have the police schedule hospitality for the homeless.

. And they feel that "City Hall shall furnish one permanent employee whose responsibility is to organize a civilian volunteer task force for assisting residents of city-run encampments with accessing shelter, food, jobs, and housing. . .

The responsibilities of this office will be organizing free trainings, workshops. And scheduling to the community to assist with filling out applications for housing, food, and jobs for those in sanctioned campsites."

. Further, "City Hall shall furnish one permanent employee whose responsibility is to act as a community outreach employee unaffiliated with the police and Community Impact Unit. . . . The Community Outreach office's responsibilities will include mediation for residents of unsanctioned campsites and establishing a personal one-on-one relationship with members of the unhoused community."

Subtext: Paid city workers would be expected to serve as schedulers and social workers.

In return, Salem's homeless population will provide . . . NOTHING.

There is no mention of how they would maintain cleanliness in their encampments, or deal with their effluvia of cigarette butts, empty nip bottles, used drug paraphernalia, and food trash. No mention of the imposition of their panhandling, loitering, and shoplifting. No mention of what *they* would contribute to Salem. Am I being mean? I'm sorry. I just pay taxes here.

This "New Camping Ordinance" –read the entire thing—sounds like satire. Their entitlement is staggering, as is their lack of understanding of where Salem's money comes from.

One other essential thing to understand: Witch City Action operates separately from Lifebridge, so even as Lifebridge is gearing up to expand—"to eliminate homeless in Salem," as its principals have claimed—this Witch City Action group has designs on turning the entire city into one giant homeless shelter.

Make your voice heard!

A change to the camping ordinance—which contains all the issues I have just outlined and more—will be under discussion at the City Council meeting on Wednesday, September 23, 6:00 p.m., at City Hall. Let's make clear that not only do we not want an expended camping ordinance, we do not wish to foot the bill for Witch City's demands. Moreover, this issue should not be up to 11 City Council members but must be a referendum brought to the citizens of Salem.

Cautionary Tales

The Boston Globe

"Aggressive panhandling, people shooting up in public, open drug sales, doorways and public parks full of those with nowhere to live, and an official laissez-faire attitude about all that antisocial behavior . . ."

This could be Salem, but in fact, it's Burlington, Vermont, as reported by Kevin Cullen in *The Boston Globe* on August 28 in his article, "On the Banks of Lake Champlain, who's harming whom?"

"August Letendre . . . recently took his daughters, ages 4 and 5, for an ice cream. . . . On their walk to the store, they passed multiple people who were openly using and selling drugs. They were followed by a man who appeared to be under the influence of something, and who began yelling incoherently at passersby. The



Look familiar? This is Burlington, Vermont, but it could be Salem. Photo: *The Boston Globe*

girls were frightened and Letendre did his best to reassure them.

“No parent should have to walk their kids through this,” Letendre said. “Letendre stressed that he considers himself very liberal and believes there should be more services for people who are mentally ill, drug-addicted, and homeless.

“This isn’t about compassion, or a lack of it,” he said. “This is about a failure of leadership. The approach our elected leaders have taken is not working.”

If you are a *Globe* subscriber, read the whole story here:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2026/08/28/metro/burlington-harm-reduction-kevin-cullen/?event=event12>

Portland Press Herald

Now let’s head up to Portland, Maine, where Kelley Bouchard, staff writer for the *Portland Press Herald*, writes in her August 13 article, “Downtown Portland is gaining an unsavory reputation. Businesses say safety concerns must be addressed.”

Bouchard opens her story with a Congress Street shop owner, Se Johg Park, who has closed the front door to his market, forcing

customers to go around back. “Park said he chose to sacrifice sidewalk access to shield his business from problems that plague Maine’s largest city — namely homelessness, substance use disorder and illicit drug sales.”

“They would shoot up in the alcove, then come in and pass out in here,” said Park, 50. I don’t want that around my customers or my family.”

Fortunately, Portland’s mayor is more proactive than ours. Reports Bouchard, “Mayor Mark Dion has fielded biting emails from friends, acquaintances, and officials in other Maine communities who say they no longer venture into the city to shop, dine or see a show.” She quotes the mayor: “It’s uncomfortable for some people to hear it, but if we don’t confront the situation, it’s only going to get worse.”

The comments to the article add to the story. Here are a couple:

. The article says Portland needs to deal with its problems around homelessness and drugs before they become entrenched. They’re already entrenched. The problems simmered on the back burner, slowly growing, for decades, then exploded during the pandemic, when the city made the mistake of allowing encampments (thankfully they backed off that policy). The problems have been growing ever since and we’ve experienced an escalation in violent crimes committed by homeless people.”

. “I recently visited Portland, Oregon, for a conference. As I walked around downtown, I became increasingly uncomfortable but decided to check it out anyway. I came upon a boutique, and to enter, I had to be buzzed in; to leave, a security guard had to escort me out. It made me sad for their community, and rather than enjoy the rest of my time there, I went back to my hotel. The locked doors clearly gave me a message that I was not safe in the city. I hope we don’t come to that!”

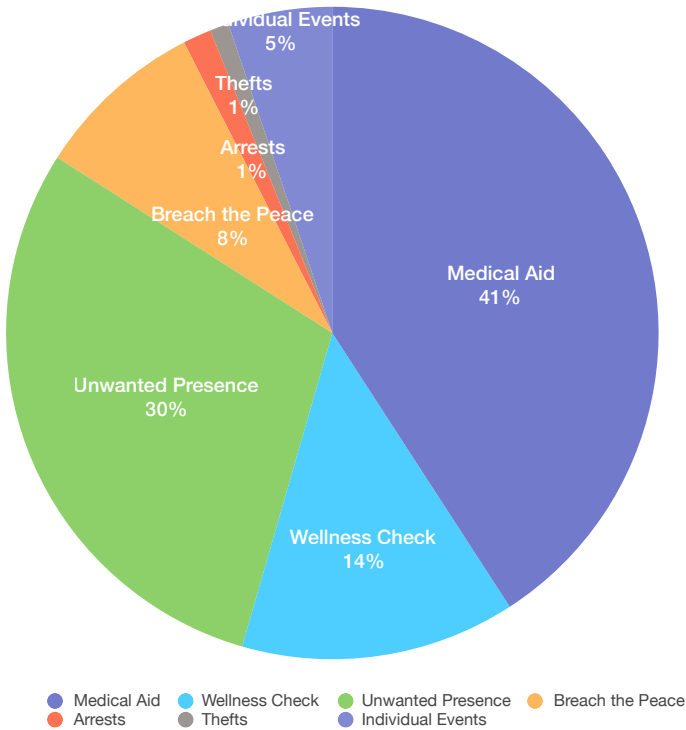
Here’s the link to the August 13 story, although you may need to be a subscriber to access it. <https://www.pressherald.com/2026/08/13/downtown-portland-is-gaining-an-unsavory-reputation-businesses-say-safety-concerns-must-be-addressed/>

This newsletter is compiled and edited monthly by Joanne Mattera

Incidents: August 1-31, 2026

TYPE	INCIDENT
Medical Aid	87
Wellness Check	29
Unwanted Presence	63
Breach the Peace	18
Arrests	3
Thefts	2
Individual Events	11
TOTAL INCIDENTS	213
SOURCE: Salem Police Dept. Terms as used by SPD.	
Infograph courtesy GESNA/ONOH.	

PERCENTAGE OF 213 INCIDENTS: AUGUST 1-31, 2026



INCIDENTS TOTAL 213: AUGUST 1-31, 2026

