



# THE HOMELESS AND YOUR BUSINESS

Homelessness is an extremely complex social problem that impacts the quality of life in our community. There are no easy solutions. The Code Compliance Office and the Santa Maria Police Department (SMPD) recognize that there is a fine line between homelessness as a social issue and a criminal issue. Many homeless are on the street because of substance abuse, mental illness, or both. Often the disorder issues associated with homelessness are criminal in nature, but difficult to enforce.

While being homeless is not a crime, many kinds of public conduct are illegal and should be reported to the SMPD. These include being intoxicated, loitering, prowling, fighting, trespassing, aggressive panhandling, soliciting, urinating and defecating, consuming alcoholic beverages in certain public places, camping or sleeping in parks, littering, obstructing sidewalks, living in a vehicle parked on a public street, disturbing the peace by loud and unreasonable noises, behaving in a threatening manner, etc.

## **Avoiding Problems**

The following tips will help you avoid problems with homeless people.

- Talk to your [SMPD Beat Coordinator](#) responsible for your area about any problems with homeless people and if warranted, file a [Letter of Authority](#) with your SM Police Station. This letter authorizes the SMPD to enter your property to investigate suspicious activity and to arrest people who are trespassing or committing a crime. Note: The form must be renewed annually.
- If you do file a Letter of Authority, you must also post **NO TRESPASSING** signs.

The signs should be no less than one (1) square foot in area and upon which, in letters, not less than two (2) inches in height, appear the words **“Trespassing – Loitering Forbidden by Law”**

**POSTING:** Signs should be posted as follows:

Section 6-2.103 SMMC

(a) Any such property, if it is not enclosed within a fence and if it is of an area not exceeding one (1) acre and if it has no lineal dimension exceeding one (1) mile, by posting signs at each corner of the area so posted, and at each entrance thereto.

(b) Any such property, if it is not enclosed within a fence, and if it is of an area exceeding one (1) acre, or if it contains any lineal

dimension exceeding one (1) mile, by posting signs along or near the exterior boundaries of the area so posted at intervals of not more than six hundred (600) feet, and also at each corner thereof, and if such property has definite entrance or entrances thereto, at each such entrance.

(c) Any such property, if it is enclosed within a fence and if it is of an area not exceeding one (1) acre, and if it has no lineal dimension exceeding one (1) mile, by posting signs at each corner of such fence and at each entrance thereto.

(d) Any such property, if it is enclosed within a fence and if it is of an area exceeding one (1) acre, or if it has any lineal dimension exceeding one (1) mile, by posting signs on, or along the line of, such fence at intervals of not more than six hundred (600) feet, and also at each corner thereof and at each entrance thereto.

(e) Any such property, if it consists of poles or towers or appurtenant structures for the suspension of wires or other conductors for conveying electricity for telegraphic or telephonic messages or of towers or derricks for the production of oil or gas, by affixing a sign upon one or more sides of such poles, towers or derricks, but such posting shall render only the pole, tower, derrick or appurtenant structure "posted property."

- Avoid confrontations and maintain a safe distance. Use caution in dealing with them.
- Do not offer food or money. It may encourage more panhandling. If you are inclined to help the homeless, it is better to contribute to local charities, missions, food banks, or social service organizations that assist the needy.
- Do not permit anyone to camp or loiter on your property.
- Do not allow anyone to store shopping carts, bedding, or other personal belongings on your property.
- Restrict access to sidewalk overhangs, alcoves, or other areas protected from inclement weather.
- Lock or remove handles from water spigots.
- Keep trash Dumpsters locked when not being filled or emptied.
- Secure outside storage sheds or containers.
- Lock or turn off exterior power outlets.
- Lock gates after hours.
- Install motion-activated exterior lighting after hours.
- Trim landscaping to eliminate hiding places. Bushes should be kept trim which would provide hiding places, block views, lighting, or camera coverage (if available).

- Keep property free of trash, litter, junk, etc.
- Use graffiti-resistant paint or anti-graffiti coatings on the sides of the building and any other design features that could be vandalized. Report graffiti and other vandalism, and clean up promptly after the officers have taken pictures, etc.
- Design public amenities to discourage misuse, e.g., shape benches and other seating to be comfortable for sitting but not for sleeping.
- Have plants at sidewalk level. If raised planter boxes are used, the sides should be at least 4 feet high or their tops should be uncomfortable for seating, e.g., by making them very narrow, allowing plants to grow over them, etc.
- Establish, post, and enforce rules of conduct for public use of private property. Include signs of nighttime curfews and prohibitions of loitering, illegal lodging, drinking alcoholic beverages, drug activities, etc. The signs should state that persons engaged in prohibited conduct will be asked to leave the property, and that failure to cease the conduct or leave the property will result in a call to the SMPD.
- Install surveillance cameras to cover public areas. Have security personnel monitor these cameras and ask persons engaged in prohibited conduct to leave the property. Security personnel should also patrol the property at random times.
- If security personnel are not available or if it is not practical to monitor the cameras all the time, install video analytics or intelligent video software in your camera system. It will alert you when something suspicious occurs. Lights could be turned on at night when motion is detected, and audio announcements could warn trespassers that the police would be called if they do not leave the property immediately.
- If signs advising of security or surveillance cameras are installed are posted and the cameras are not monitored all the time, the sign should include that caveat. This is important to keep people from having a false sense of security and expecting help in the event they are in danger.
- Consider sponsoring an SMPD video surveillance camera for your area through “Operation Blue Watch.”

### **IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

<b>Abandoned vehicles on the street</b>	<b>928-3781 Ext. 2956</b>
<b>Abandoned shopping carts</b>	<b>925-0951 Ext. 2667</b>
<b>Community Development/Building Permits</b>	<b>925-0951 Ext. 2241</b>
<b>Community Development/Planning Division</b>	<b>925-0951 Ext. 2244</b>
<b>Code Enforcement Division</b>	<b>925-0951 Ext. 2420</b>
<b>Graffiti on fences &amp; walls</b>	<b>925-0951 Ext. 2667</b>
<b>Police non-emergency / Beat Coordinators</b>	<b>928-3781</b>
<b>Refuse containers overflowing</b>	<b>925-0951 Ext. 7270</b>
<b>Streetlight not working &amp; pot holes</b>	<b>925-0951 Ext. 2804</b>

City’s website: [www.cityofsantamaria.org](http://www.cityofsantamaria.org)