

Daly City balks at helping anti-litter effort

By Carina Woudenberg | For the San Mateo County Times

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DALY CITY -- Litter has become an eyesore at Mussel Rock Park, but Helen Nicely is doing something about it.

Nicely organizes a formal pickup at the park twice a year as a member of the Pacifica Beach Coalition -- a nonprofit aimed at keeping trash off area beaches. But because of the volume of trash, Nicely recently took it upon herself to clean up Mussel Rock Park as often as once a day.

"I've never seen such filthy, dirty beaches than we have right here," said Nicely, of Daly City. "It's not just a random thing. It's purposeful littering."

Now Nicely is asking public works officials to put up an anti-littering sign at a spot that's especially popular among litterbugs.

She thinks it will acts as a deterrent, tugging at the consciences of potential garbage-strewers.

John Fuller, the city's public works director, disagrees.

"The kind of people that litter don't even read signs," said Fuller, adding that he appreciates the efforts of Nicely and others to keep the area clean.

A sign would cost \$300 to install, Fuller said, and with the city trying to put every penny to good use these days, he just doesn't feel a sign would be money well spent. Within two months, he added, a sign would likely be covered in graffiti.

At a cleanup Nicely organized last month, there were clumps of garbage marring the park's lookout point and the grassy hills below.

Plenty of cigarette butts and beer bottles were visible -- as were some larger, more unusual items like a 4-foot plastic Santa Claus. Since she's been cleaning up the area, Nicely said she's seen a mattress, vinyl records and even cracked bowling balls.

Nicely said some of the trash can be attributed to the park's proximity to the Mussel Rock Transfer Station Disposal Site -- some people abandon their unwanted items in the park when the dump is closed.

Another factor is the park's out-of-the-way location, which is attractive to people who like to come after dark to smoke, drink or hide other behavior. Shotgun shells and used condoms are items Nicely finds regularly.

Nicely is so fed up that she's willing to raise the money for a sign herself. And she's not concerned about the sign getting tagged. Even if it were covered in graffiti, it would still serve its purpose, she said.

The medical writer said she's seen firsthand how signage can change people's behavior.

On the Fourth of July, Nicely put up a temporary sign in the area reinforcing Daly City's laws against fireworks and discouraging amateur firework displays. Nicely said she saw no evidence of fireworks this year.

In the past, the area has looked like a "war zone" on July 5.



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Fuller said that particular sign only got attention because it was in effect for one day.

"People will pay attention to that because it's unique," he said. "You're only trying to control people's behavior for a 24-hour period."

Pacifica Beach Coalition member Joe Recto said he has mixed feelings about placing a sign in the area. But he uses the area for recreational activities like paragliding and fishing, and hates to see it trashed.

He would welcome a sign if he knew it would help, but he has his doubts.

"Do you have to be told not to throw garbage on the ground?" Recto asked.

Still, Nicely is adamant.

"You have to be the change you want to see in the world in a small way," she said. "And this is our small way."

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