



California Association of Code Enforcement Officers
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**KEEPING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD SAFE...NOT YOUR PROBLEM?
THINK AGAIN!**

Frontline Tips for California Residents from Code Enforcement Officers

SACRAMENTO, CA — As the number of foreclosures rise, so does vandalism in thousands of California homes left vacant and unattended, raising safety concerns for local residents. Uncut and overgrown lawns stand out as eyesores with grass and weeds drying up in the summer heat igniting fears of fire. Health risks increase as unattended swimming pools attract a host of mosquitoes and other disease-carrying pests.

During National Safety Month, the California Association of Code Enforcement Officers (CACEO) offers a host of ideas for keeping neighborhoods safe. “People who keep their property clean and maintained show they care about their neighborhood and are looking out for others, which goes a long way toward safety,” said Joe Garcia, code enforcement officer for the City of Petaluma and CACEO board member. “The more people there are who disregard their property, the more crime increases.”

In addition to keeping their own yards and homes well maintained, residents can do their part by reporting violations in their neighborhood to the local code enforcement office. Common reports of violations include indoor mold, hoarding, overgrown weeds and vegetation, accumulations of trash and garbage, inoperative vehicles, broken windows, abandoned pools and ongoing construction noise.

In the case of suspected drug dealing, residents should watch for people coming and going at all hours of day or night who only stay in the house for a brief period of time. “Go with your gut instinct,” suggests Garcia, “and when in doubt, call your local code enforcement office or law enforcement agency. Even if you’re uncertain, it never hurts to call.”

In any case, your safety is a top priority. Never take circumstances into your own hands by directly addressing your neighbor about a potential violation. People who are confronted with code violations often respond with anger. Code enforcement officers are trained to handle volatile situations and know when to call for back-up from a peace officer. “We have multiple tools available that we can use to bring a property into compliance,” added Garcia. “That’s our job.”

Fear of retribution by an angry neighbor can be a deterrent to reporting violations. That’s why the California Evidence Code prohibits a government enforcement agency from releasing the identity of a reporting party without their permission.

There also are safety tips to observe when you're on the receiving end of a violation. If a code enforcement officer knocks on your door, always ask for identification. All legitimate officers will gladly show you their ID badge.

Although the time given to correct a violation varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, most grant a reasonable timeframe unless the violation poses a threat to life, health or safety. And what if you disagree with the citation? Each jurisdiction has its own appeals process.

So, what is the downside to community residents who don't have code enforcement officers? They often have no place to turn for help. "Problems associated with code violations that go unchecked often will spread like a cancer until it's too late," cautioned Garcia. At the same time, code enforcement officers who have initiated "neighborhood sweeps" to encourage residents to "clean up their act" have had great success. "We've included up to six city blocks at a time just getting the outside of the homes cleaned up," reported Garcia. "Neighborhood clean-ups are the biggest way to improve safety in a neighborhood. They often bring neighbors together who wouldn't normally work together—it improves their sense of community."

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CACEO exists to promote and advance the profession of code enforcement while serving and supporting its members by offering comprehensive education and certification, providing legislative advocacy on issues of importance to the code enforcement profession, and facilitating a network for an exchange of information and technology. For more information, visit www.caceo.us.