

Re: Public Comment  
Council File: 13-1493  
Title: Street Vending / Special Sidewalk Vending  
District Program

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## Cleaning L.A.'s streets

**L**OS ANGELES HAS A trash problem. Streets, alleys and vacant lots are so littered with debris and garbage that a recent internal city report warned that some neighborhoods look unsafe and ungoverned. Only one-third of city streets are regularly swept. There's a backlog of 400 abandoned waste sites — trash-filled lots and the like — that need to be cleared. And until very recently, there's been no almost no enforcement of illegal dumping laws. There are few city services more basic than cleaning the streets, and L.A. needs to develop a comprehensive system for making sure it gets done.

Curbside waste and illegal dumping are long-standing issues in L.A., but they got worse after the recession and the city budget crunch. The city used to spend \$12 million a year to remove abandoned waste, but much of that program was cut. The Bureau of Street Services has stopped cleaning alleys regularly and has reduced by nearly a third the number of miles of street swept because of delays in replacing retired drivers.

But the trash problem isn't just a budget issue. The new city report, produced by the Office of the City Administrator, suggests that L.A. needs to reorganize and modernize its approach. For example, the city hasn't changed its street sweeping routes in years and doesn't give priority to the most

heavily used streets. The Bureau of Sanitation does a good job responding to calls from residents to pick up abandoned couches or mattresses but the city hasn't kept track of those calls in order to assess where garbage is illegally dumped. How can the city develop programs to proactively keep streets from getting dirty if it doesn't know where the dirtiest streets are? New York City regularly checks street and sidewalk cleanliness and issues monthly ratings. San Francisco has adopted standards for odors, litter, grime, graffiti and trash can fullness, and ranks the cleanest and dirtiest streets.

This year, Mayor Eric Garcetti and the City Council budgeted \$5 million to begin addressing the backlog of abandoned waste sites. But as the city begins to restore some basic services, L.A. should be designing a smarter, data-driven street cleaning program. That means spending more time and money in the dirtiest areas of the city, where dumpsites only beget more illegal dumping. It means investigating and cracking down on illegal commercial dumping (something the city attorney's office has recently begun). And it means setting measurable standards for how clean L.A.'s streets should be and then working with communities to meet and maintain those standards. Life in the big city may be gritty but it doesn't have to be trashy.

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# L.A. lags in picking up street trash

A blunt report blames businesses and residents for dumping refuse and the city for not enforcing rules.

BY BEN POSTON AND  
EMILY ALPERT REYES

The streets, alleys and empty lots of Los Angeles are so dirty with trash that it threatens the city's image and makes some areas appear "unsafe and ungoverned," according to an internal report obtained by The Times.

The blunt assessment blames residents and businesses for dumping debris with impunity and the city for failing to enforce anti-dumping laws, leaving some L.A. neighborhoods in a "constant state of uncleanness."

The city spends more than \$12 million annually to remove abandoned furniture, electronics, boxes and other items from streets, but it can't keep up with the problem, the report found.

The report was written by city senior livability advisor Mark A. Thomas for City Administrative Officer Miguel Santana's office. It draws on dozens of interviews with City Hall insiders, residents, business leaders and advocates about nuisances such as dumping, abandoned furniture and litter that sullies Los Angeles' roads.

"When you live in a big city, there is a certain amount of grittiness you expect," Santana said in an interview. "But there is an expectation that the status quo isn't good enough anymore. We can accept that when I go drop my kid off at school I'm going to see half a dozen couches, or we could say that is not acceptable."

The findings come amid complaints from neighborhood groups who question why the city isn't doing more to clean up streets.

Olivia Vasquez, president of the Harbor Gateway South Neighborhood Council, said dumping is a serious quality-of-life issue in her working-class neighborhood. During a community clean-up effort last fall, volunteers filled two construction-size dumpsters with discarded furniture, mattresses and tires from just

the problem spot near South Western Avenue and Plaza Del Amo.

"I know more people are getting irritated by it," Vasquez said. "It's a great community, we just need to get it cleaned up."

The city has no formal assessment of how much garbage is illegally dumped on city streets, but piecemeal efforts highlight the extent of the problem. For example, a private nonprofit devoted to cleaning and marketing the Fashion District downtown collects six tons of illegally dumped garbage every day, according to the report. Cleanups in South L.A.

[See Trash, AA5]



**MEMBERS OF THE** California Conservation Corps clean up an alley where debris was dumped in the Pico-Union neighborhood in October. The city spends more than \$12 million annually to remove abandoned furniture, electronics, boxes and other items on streets.

Photographs by **GENARO MOLINA** Los Angeles Times



MIGUEL SANTANA, L.A.'s city administrative officer

## 'There is an expectation that the status quo isn't good enough anymore.'

by some members was overstated, according to a source familiar with the investigation who declined to be named because of the ongoing inquiry.

The inquiry began after investigators received a tip, the source said.

mates are required to get Coast Guard licenses.

Sanders said the LAFD conducted a similar internal investigation two years ago but was unable to substantiate allegations that records had been falsified.

Chris Volkle, a commer-

cial ship captain who heads Marine Fire Training a Seattle-area academy that provides training for on-the-water firefighters, said most private maritime companies and fire departments have

Mayor Eric Garcetti, then-Assistant Chief Ralph M. Terrazas oversaw port operations. Terrazas has been briefed on the investigation, but had no comment on it, Sanders said.

Battalion Chief Raymundo Gomez, who supervises

Lt. Cmdr. Joe Klinker Coast Guard spokesman said "the investigation is active," which precludes additional comment.

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# Street trash hurting city's image

[Trash, from AA1] have pulled as much as 100 tons of garbage from a single alley.

Many merchants rely on privately funded Business Improvement Districts to fill the void by cleaning gutters and sidewalks. Arts District Chairman Dilip Bhavnani said that improvement districts like his are "forced to exist to do what the city should be providing."

"We are paying taxes, we should have services," Bhavnani said. "But the facts are the city doesn't have enough money for it."

The report found that many residential and commercial corridors have no formal street trash can service. Sanitation department staffers recently mapped city trash bins for the first time and found there are 700 in Los Angeles, far fewer than the several thousand thought to be in operation, Thomas said.

Only 35% of city streets are cleaned on a regular basis, with little priority given to streets with heavier traffic, the report found. Even on streets that are supposed to get regular sweeping, lapses occur "for a number of unclear reasons." And when street cleaners don't sweep posted routes, parking enforcement officers from the Department of Transportation write tickets anyway, which "dampens the relationship and perception of our priorities as a city," the report says.

The report calls for a task force to develop and implement a comprehensive management plan to ensure cleaner streets, alleys and sidewalks.

Thomas submitted his report after conducting 70 interviews, visiting all 35 of the city's community plan areas and conferring with



**A PEDESTRIAN** walks past a pile of trash in Pico-Union. The city has no formal assessment of how much garbage is illegally dumped on the streets, and it can't keep up with the problem, an internal report finds.

several city agencies.

L.A. should look to New York City's Project Scorecard, a data-driven approach to cleaning up neighborhoods, the report says. Street cleanliness measurements in New York, based on photographic sampling of streets and sidewalks, improved to more than a 90% acceptable rating last year compared with 53% in 1980.

The report's findings show the challenges facing Mayor Eric Garcetti as he attempts to carry out his "back-to-basics" agenda, which aims to improve the city's core services.

Garcetti has made neighborhood cleanliness a focus

of his administration, the mayor's spokeswoman Vicki Curry said.

The mayor's office has used technology to improve efficiency, such as giving sanitation drivers smartphone apps instead of paper maps so they can complete their routes faster. And since Garcetti took office last year, the percentage of bulky item calls picked up the next collection day has increased from 81% to 96%, Curry said.

In the last year, city officials have taken new steps to try to combat the problem: City Atty. Mike Feuer last month announced the creation of a strike force to combat illegal dumping in the

city's most notorious sites for such activity.

Since its launch, his office has filed criminal charges against three suspected violators, Feuer said.

Kevin James, president of the Board of Public Works, did not respond to requests for comment.

Councilman Gil Cedillo, who championed a pilot program in his district last year to combat blight in alleys and other empty spaces, is pushing for a system that tracks the amount of trash dumped in different areas so that the city can target cleaning to the worst-hit areas.

By better coordinating

and targeting the resources it already has, Cedillo believes the city could improve cleanliness without a massive increase in costs.

Councilman Joe Buscino, who heads the council Public Works Committee, said "this report is no big secret."

"We've been living it ever since day," he said. "We respond, we clean an alley, and it gets dumped on again in matter of days. It's a never-ending battle."

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Times staff writer David Zahniser contributed to this report.