

Monuments/Memorial Responses

ALHAMBRA

We haven't experience a lot of these. Maybe three in the past four years; the most recent happening last weekend. We don't have a written policy. What we have done is keep them up as long as they don't cause a hazard in the public right of way. After the funeral or a respectable amount of time (one week) we respectfully box up the items left in the right of way and the police department contacts the family to ask if they would like the items. It's a touchy subject. Good Luck.

Mary Chavez
Dep Dir of Public Works
City of Alhambra

BRENTWOOD

We don't have such a policy here in Brentwood, but I believe we could use one. Could you please let me know what your research reveals.

Thanks,
Mike Davies
Brentwood PD
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LA CANADA-FLINTRIDGE

The City of La Canada Flintridge has no policy on this issue, and fortunately, we have had no problems with such memorials. I am however interested in how cities do handle these "touchy" issues.

Steve Castellanos

UNION CITY

We do not have a written policy. They way we handle this is by contacting the family after a couple of days and advise them of the right of way issues and ask if they would prefer removing the items and if not the city will remove the items within the next day or so.

We've found that by working with the families and explaining why the removal is necessary; they understand the reason for the removal and it does not interfere with their grieving.

Good Luck!

Chief Randy Ulibarri
Union City Police Department
(510) 675-5251

EL CAJON

No policy here, just an observation.... As recent as last week a large memorial was erected at the scene of a store robbery / double homicide.

The flowers, candles, gifts of cash left on the sidewalk were the largest I have seen. As usual, no problems, issues, or crimes resulted. In fact the news media coverage of the community's outrage over this event prompted several leads in the case.

Trying to overly regulate these events can be a loser politically.

Your relationship with ethnic groups, religious groups, and your public relations will likely suffer.

Cliff Diamond
Chief of Police
El Cajon, CA

VACAVILLE

Hello Troy: This issue came up while I was working in Oakland. We developed an informal policy in which we instructed officers to first ask family members and/or close friends of the deceased to take down these memorials after a few days. If they did not, or if items were added after the memorials were removed, we instructed our staff to remove and keep for safe keeping personal items, such as teddy bears, photographs, journals, etc. Other, worthless items, such as liquor bottles, were discarded.

We also moved in quickly to take down such memorials if we felt their presence could prompt an act of retaliatory violence. We experienced this at least once when gang members affiliated with the deceased were attacked by rival gang members while visiting a memorial.

I hope this is helpful
Take care.

Rich Word
Vacaville PD

MARINA

I was involved in this issue a few years ago with a number of shooting locations. We decided not to go there, too many emotional issues. We simply had the public works dept make sure the side walk was clear and it did not impede traffic. After a few weeks they disappeared.

Good luck.

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FAIRFIELD

Fairfield rarely has a death in or adjacent to a City street where a memorial is established. If I remember correctly, in 2005, we only had one memorial established and it was along a curve on a 4-lane arterial street.

A motorcyclist lost control and hit a tree. Because of the fairly dense landscaping, the memorial was not very visible. Public Works left it for about 30 days and then removed it.

Fairfield does not have a written policy because of the infrequent occurrence. PW uses its judgment and if the location could cause a traffic accident due to "gawkers," we would remove it after seeing the memorial and notify the relatives if that is possible.

Charlie Beck
Director of Public Works
Fairfield

EL MONTE

They usually extinguish by themselves over time.....if they don't, we have simply contacted the family and advised them when the memorial will be removed and invite them to take anything they may want in remembrance.....then.....we send our city yard guys (sent officers too when the memorial involved an individual that was shot and killed by us).....in the early a.m. and remove everything before the public gets on the street.....we don't have a "policy", but this works for us.....

Tom Armstrong, Assistant Chief of Police
El Monte Police Department
(626-580-2106)

SOUTH PASADENA

My city does not have a sample policy for you but I'd like to provide my insight from a personal point of view. My son and his family live in Santa Clarita, just outside Los Angeles. There are many long open stretches in that area and they have a large number of traffic fatalities, often involving young people who are either racing, or DUI or under the influence of some other drug. They always result in a makeshift memorial, usually remaining for years.

Wednesday, March 15 was an anniversary of sorts for my family. One year ago my daughter-in-law and granddaughter were struck head-on by a 26 year old who crossed over the center line on Plum Canyon Road in Santa Clarita. Their combined speed was in excess of 80 mph. He was driving on a suspended license, on probation for DUI in an unregistered, uninsured van. He died at the scene leaving a wife and small child. My daughter-in-law and granddaughter were both airlifted in critical condition. My granddaughter has fully recovered and my daughter-in-law still faces multiple surgeries. As is the custom, his dirtbag, methamphetamine using friends erected a memorial on the site. Every time my son and his family, their friends, or I drive by, we are reminded how this guy devastated not only his family, but many others as well.

I tell you all of this to point out there are issues other than just the potential for liability and crashes. Obviously, if it's on private land, your options are limited. My experience is that these memorials usually are put up on public property.

Consideration should be given to the family members of the person who died. Whether the person

who died was at fault or an innocent victim, there will always be people who suffered. But, others may be offended by it and your identification that it is a public safety hazard warrant removing it after a reasonable period of time. I would recommend a policy of removing it after 30 days would be reasonable and appropriate. Obviously this needs to be publicized and the family members need to have the option of removing it themselves. If they don't, perhaps some way of keeping it in storage for perhaps another 30 days to allow family members to retrieve the items they want would also be appropriate.

I don't know if any other agency has addressed this. I think it's timely and I recommend you let everyone else know what you come up with through the California Police Chiefs website.

Dan Watson
Chief of Police
South Pasadena Police Department

SELMA

The City of Selma does not have any policy in place. Your thoughts do bring up thoughts regarding the traffic safety issue. If you do locate an ordinance would you mind forwarding the information on to me. At the present time we have two such sites, one site has been in place for almost two years. Thank you.

Lt. Bob Johnson
Selma Police Department
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SAN BERNARDINO

I'm responding to your request on behalf of the San Bernardino Police Department. We do not have any municipal code or policy regarding street-side memorials. The only way we might try to regulate them is if they were blocking a sidewalk or physically impeding traffic. Then we would use the appropriate vehicle code or municipal code section for that. As a side note, I was driving through Florida on backroads a couple of years ago and they actual erect a black silhouette cut-out of a body everywhere that a fatal TC occurred. You can even tell by the size and shape whether the fatality was a man, woman, boy or girl. They didn't seem to have the roadside memorial problem because, I suppose, people are satisfied that their loved one is memorialized by the silhouette, and they're probably pretty effective a slowing traffic down too. I know they slowed me down! Please let me know if I can provide any further information.

Gwendolyn Waters
Administrative Sergeant to the Executive Staff
San Bernardino Police Department
(909)384-5600

NEVADA COUNTY

We have the same concerns you do about the roadside memorials. And our crews have had some unpleasant encounters with relatives and friends when they have gone to clean them up or remove them.

So when I saw that CalTrans and Placer County (our neighbor to the South) has put programs in place, we drafted the attached program for Nevada County.
But when I floated it by some BOS members, I learned that there were objections to replacing the informal memorials with official signs - even though the signs have a sunset provision. Seeing that there was not enough support to approve the program, I did not submit it to the BOS. We'll monitor things and re-submit it when there is adequate support.
I hope that the attached info is helpful.
Michael

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ATWATER

My name is Richard Hawthorne, I am the Chief of Police for the Atwater Police Department which is located in the Central Valley. I read your e-mail to CAL Chief's regarding the monuments. I was about to make the same request. If you receive any responses, I would kindly ask if would forward the information or the names of the Agencies that responded to me also. Our City suffered two fatalities this year and we have impromptu monuments at both locations.

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