WINDOW CLEANING BAY AREA

WHITE PAPER

Graffiti, Gum And Sidewalk Cleaning Obligations For Bay Area Businesses

San Francisco's 30-day graffiti abatement rule, California's sidewalk maintenance duty for fronting owners, and the wash water rules that apply when the frontage gets cleaned.

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Executive Summary

Graffiti, gum and grime on a storefront or sidewalk are more than a looks problem. In San Francisco, private owners have a fixed deadline to remove graffiti, and state law makes owners of lots fronting a public street responsible for keeping the adjacent sidewalk in safe condition. Cleaning that frontage then brings stormwater wash water rules into play. This paper summarizes those three layers from official sources, using San Francisco as the example.

Key Points

- **SF 30-Day Rule:** San Francisco's Graffiti Ordinance "requires that private property owners abate graffiti from their buildings within 30 days." SF Public Works
- **Where It Lives:** The details are in SF Public Works Code Article 23, Section 1300. SF Public Works
- **Sidewalk Duty:** Owners of lots fronting a public street must keep the sidewalk from endangering persons or property. Sts. & High. Code §5610
- **Wash Water:** Wash water must be contained and kept out of storm drains (see G2). Clean Water Program

Local Graffiti Ordinances (SF Example)

SF Public Works says it "will paint out graffiti on public property and notify other agencies and private property owners, so they can quickly remove it." Residents can report graffiti online, through the SF311 app or by calling 311. The department publishes a Graffiti Notice of Violation and a Graffiti Blight Notice, along with guidance on what to do if you receive one. SF Public Works

Other Bay Area cities have their own rules. Check your city's municipal code; this paper cites only San Francisco.

Sidewalk Maintenance Responsibility

Streets and Highways Code §5610 provides that owners of lots fronting a public street "shall maintain any sidewalk in such condition that the sidewalk will not endanger persons or property and maintain it in a condition which will not interfere with the public convenience." It excludes conditions created by others under a permit, who then carry a similar duty. §5610 Gum buildup and slippery grime are practical reasons businesses schedule periodic sidewalk cleaning, though the statute speaks to safe condition rather than appearance.

Wash Water Rules Apply

Pressure washing graffiti or sidewalks creates wash water. Bay Area clean water program guidance for surface cleaning tells cleaners to sweep and collect debris first, then "contain, collect and discharge any wash water to the sanitary" sewer rather than letting it reach gutters or storm drains, and to contact the local wastewater agency before discharging to the sanitary sewer. Clean Water Program G2 covers the regional permit in detail.

Response Timelines

Jurisdiction / Rule	Requirement	Source
San Francisco Graffiti Ordinance	Private owners abate graffiti within 30 days	SF Public Works; PW Code Art. 23 §1300
California (Statewide)	Fronting owners keep sidewalk safe for persons and property	Sts. & High. Code §5610
Bay Area Clean Water Programs	Contain wash water; keep it out of storm drains	Clean Water Program; MRP (G2)

Practical Steps For Businesses

- **Act Fast On Graffiti:** Track the 30-day clock from the first sighting or notice.
- **Photograph Before And After:** Keep a record if you receive a notice.
- **Ask How Wash Water Is Handled:** Ask any pressure washing contractor how it handles wash water.

Sources

- SF Public Works, Graffiti. https://www.sfpublicworks.org/services/graffiti
- Cal. Streets & Highways Code §5610. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=SHC&sectionNum=5610.
- Clean Water Program (Alameda County), Tips for Surface Cleaning. https://www.cleanwaterprogram.org
- SF Bay Regional Water Board, Municipal Regional Permit R2-2022-0018.

This paper summarizes regulations and agency guidance for general information and is not legal advice. Requirements may change and vary by city; consult the current text, your local agency and qualified professionals.

About Window Cleaning Bay Area

Window Cleaning Bay Area provides commercial window cleaning, pressure washing and solar panel cleaning across the San Francisco Bay Area. Contact: grayson@windowcleaningbayarea.com