



City Attorney's Investigators Going Out Every Day to Keep Us Safe

By City Attorney Mara W. Elliott

"Hazmat Mondays" will never be as popular as "casual Fridays," but the smart work attire for some employees in the City Attorney's Office now includes head-to-toe biohazard suits.

It's all part of our crackdown on substandard housing and nuisance properties that harm the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

When my Office sends investigators to inspect unhealthy and nuisance properties, they never know what sort of waste, filth, or disease they may encounter. Their work takes them to dilapidated buildings, party and drug houses, and group living facilities where vulnerable seniors and dependent adults live in deplorable and unsanitary conditions

Though not a large team – two supervisors and ten investigators – the evidence they gather is crucial to our ability to prosecute property owners who violate health and safety laws.

So when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, these unsung heroes suited up.

Recently their work has led to the court-ordered closure of a substandard independent living facility, and criminal charges of theft and abuse of a dependent adult against the operator of another group home.

The pandemic has left no one more vulnerable than seniors, who have a greater risk of serious health problems and are more impacted by isolation from stay-at-home orders. Our work ensures they have a safe place to live, with running water, working heaters, and living spaces free of filth and vermin.

They also investigate so-called COVID-19 "pandemic party houses," like the La Jolla mansion where hundreds of party-goers would gather at events that resulted in gunfire, assaults, excessive noise, traffic, and ongoing neighborhood disruption. Our City's police force spent more than 170 hours responding to calls at this residence, and my office has spent countless additional hours addressing this property through the courts.

Our Office invested in protective clothing and equipment so that our investigators could continue their important work despite obstacles created by the pandemic. Sometimes they have even performed inspections via their cell phone cameras to support the investigation of code violations in the City, serving as the eyes and ears for investigators.

Our Office made the decision to put public safety as our top priority. We took the steps to equip our team with all the necessary personal protective equipment to keep them and those they work with safe from infection. I am proud of our investigators and their contributions to

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the welfare of our city's residents despite the great challenges they face.

Their dedication to their jobs has improved the lives of countless San Diegans, and protected the integrity of our neighborhoods. For more information about our neighborhood programs, please go to www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney.

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