

# Officials hope to end Highway 1 tagging

Paint-wielding vandals hit new sound wall

By CALVIN MEN

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SANTA CRUZ — A 75-foot-long graffiti tag is the latest vandalism along the new sound wall fronting the Highway 1 widening between Soquel Avenue and Morrissey Boulevard. Authorities hope it will be one of the last, but they aren't holding their breath.

"We are taking steps to collaborate with CHP and local law enforcement because we're getting hit on a pretty regular basis here," said Kim Shultz, senior transportation planner for Santa Cruz Regional Transportation

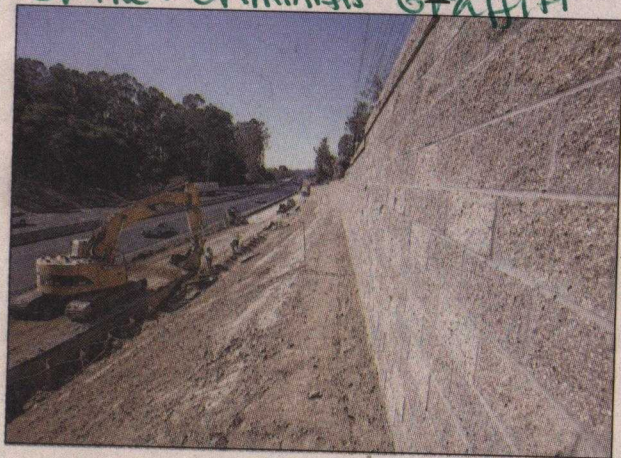
## IF YOU SEE GRAFFITI

Call the city of Santa Cruz's hotline at 831-420-5303

Commission and manager for the widening project.

Since construction began in February 2012, there have been about six to a dozen instances of graffiti along the project's roughly

SEE GRAFFITI ON A5



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Crews work along Highway 1 in Santa Cruz near the sound wall at the La Fonda overcrossing on Oct. 18.

## GRAFFITI

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one-mile stretch. The vandalism ranges from relatively small tags to the most recent one, which spans three walls and is colored orange, brown, purple, black and white.

The project-zone graffiti is removed by construction workers because the project is under the jurisdiction of the Regional Transportation Commission. After the project is done, maintenance duties including graffiti removal will shift to Caltrans. The project is scheduled to wrap up in December.

Construction workers usually remove graffiti a few

days after it appears to discourage others, Shultz said.

While cleaning up the graffiti doesn't significantly slow construction, it does sap resources and time.

"You have to get supplies, equipment there," Shultz said. "It detracts from the purpose of their being there."

While cover-up paint on other walls along Highway 1 offers proof of occasional tagging, graffiti along Santa Cruz County highways is more of a nuisance than a serious problem, said Susana Cruz, Caltrans public information officer.

"It's not even once a month," Cruz said. "It seems to be more predominant in the summertime when the

kids are out of school and have nothing to do."

One preventative measure is planting thick shrubbery along the walls to discourage taggers, Cruz said.

Landscaping is slated to be installed on the northbound side of the construction project, where the most recent graffiti appeared, officials said. Landscaping on the southbound side has already been installed.

Cruz said most graffiti is removed within a few days, with costs ranging from \$20 to \$5,000, depending on how many workers are called to clean it up, its size and location. The paint is free, as it's donated.

The Transportation Commission will be working with

local law enforcement is hopes of preventing further vandalism.

"We want to start to tighten up," Shultz said.

Nabbing the culprits is difficult, though.

The California Highway Patrol is sometimes called to document graffiti, taking note of the color, style and purpose, officer Brad Sadek said.

But it's difficult to arrest taggers unless they're caught in the act, and that doesn't happen often in the county.

"I can't even remember the last time someone had arrested a tagger," Sadek said.

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