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► [Safety](#)

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► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#)
(web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/
Library](#)

► [Metro Cafe](#) (pdf)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Retirement
Round-up](#)

Metro Info

► [Strategic Plan](#) (pdf)

► [Org Chart](#) (pdf)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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The Chinatown Abatement Team, from left, LAPD Officer Ken Lew, Deputy Eric Jaime, Sgt. Steven Morris, Officer Michael Fiola, CHP Officers John Martin and Richard Langsdale, Officer Armando Alvarez, Deputies Robert Anderson, Richard Faulk, James Johnson, Ed Ohandjanian and Craig McClelland, and Nurse Suzanne Newberry of the LA County Department of Mental Health.



Chinatown Abatement Team Clears Encampments Near Metro Gold Line Station

- Safety and crime were issues for area
- Help offered to those who would accept it

By KIM SIM

(April 16, 2004) For at least a decade, transients and homeless people lived on the hill at the 1300 block of North Broadway Avenue.

But it wasn't until the Metro Gold Line opened in June 2003 that authorities realized the potential safety and crime issues that could be associated with the large number of transients in the area.

The hill is just west of the tracks, less than a mile away from the Gold Line's Chinatown station at the intersection of Spring and College Streets.

To minimize the problems, Sheriff's deputies, along with LAPD and CHP officers, launched the Chinatown Abatement Program in mid-February.

The project — an effort to clear and



The Chinatown Abatement Team takes down a temporary homeless shelter in the shadow of the Chinatown Metro Gold Line station.

clean up the location — has been a success, according to team leader Deputy Eric Jaime of the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau.

'Heeded the warnings'

"People living there have moved on," Jaime says. "They heeded the warnings that were coming in."

Although the abatement program has concluded, the task force still visits the site two to four times a week, during either the early morning or night hours, "just to see if anyone's taking up shop in what was an encampment area," Jaime says.

"We have to continue to monitor it and work with the community and make sure it stays clear of transients," he says. "So far (the program)'s very successful in the sense that we've got these people out, but that's only half the work. The rest of the work is cleaning up and keeping them out."

The cleanup phase could take up to a month to complete.

In addition to hauling trash and other debris away from the site, Jaime says a "cave" dug by transients under the hill for shelter needs to be filled in with concrete and dirt to discourage other transients from living there.

Encampments sparked concerns

The encampments had sparked concerns about safety and criminal activity.

The safety of both the transients and rail patrons became a major issue because of the Chinatown station's proximity to the encampments. From a law enforcement perspective, there was also the concern about having a possible place for criminals to gather and hide.

But because of the nature of the operation, Jaime says, "We also have to tread lightly and consider the human factors where people are down and out and they need help. Our purpose in doing this is not so much to disrupt these people or to hurt them, it's really to give them an opportunity and also to clean up the area."



Workers struggle to collect a mound of trash discarded by homeless people living alongside the Metro Gold Line tracks. Below, two homeless people gather up their belongings and prepare to abandon a cave built beneath a roadway near the Metro Gold Line tracks.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHERIFF'S TRANSIT SERVICES BUREAU

Along with the 15-member Chinatown Abatement Program team, the Crisis Response Unit — Sheriff's Deputy Craig McClelland and registered nurse Suzanne Newberry from the Department of Mental Health — was dispatched to offer help to those willing to accept it.

The Crisis Response Unit puts the homeless in touch with social services that range from medical care and shelter to drug and alcohol treatment.

"My goal is not to take them to jail...", says McClelland. "Jail, itself, is not going to change the person or fix the problem. Social services are designed to do that."

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