

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

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*Making Conservation  
a California Way of Life.*

August 22, 2018

Ms. Patty Mayall

Director, Protect of Watershed San Mateo County  
pattymayall@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Mayall:

This letter is in response to your email regarding herbicide spraying in San Mateo County. The enclosed information should provide you with helpful information about the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) policies and efforts to control vegetation along state highways in San Mateo County.

Regarding vegetation control on I-280, SR 84, and SR 35 in San Mateo County, Caltrans has implemented a program called Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM), a practice which uses several methods of vegetation control, including herbicides, mowing, and weed whacking.

Good vegetation control is needed for the safety of motorists and cyclists. Tall weeds obscure traffic signs and block sightlines, making it difficult for drivers to see around bends in the road. Fire danger is another concern. Dry weeds make natural fuel for wildfires which as we know, have devastated large swaths of California in the past few years. Lastly, an invasive plant called stinkwort is thriving along the highways, notably along I-280 San Mateo County, where it competes with local fauna.

In places deemed safe, Caltrans mows weeds including stretches along SR 35 and SR 84, two of the highways that you mention in your letter. Caltrans typically sprays herbicides in areas where it is unsafe for our workers to be on foot near fast moving traffic or within narrow shoulders. An example is I-280, as well as mountainous parts of SR 85 and SR 35 where curves in the road block sightlines of Caltrans employees who may be working on the shoulder. In locations where stinkwort thrives, herbicide is used because of the plant's tenacity because mowing or weed whacking exacerbates the problem by spreading its seeds.

Caltrans workers are trained to follow federal and state laws pertaining to pesticide use. All herbicides are used in accordance with respective federal labeling, California Code of Regulations, as well as Caltrans policy. The herbicides Caltrans uses are registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR). Caltrans reviews the list and applies the best choice option in this case the use of the herbicides Glyphosate.

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When applying herbicides, Caltrans follows strict protocols as required, including leaving buffer zones adjacent to creeks, wetlands, waterways, drainage outlets, private driveways, and mailboxes.

Thank you for contacting Caltrans regarding your concerns with the use of herbicides in San Mateo County. I would like to reassure you that Caltrans annually reviews the current policy regarding herbicide application to ensure we are in compliance with the laws of managing vegetation along state highways, in order to ensure the safety of the traveling public.

If you have any further questions and or need further clarification please contact Mr. Jeffrey Weiss, Public Information Officer (PIO) at (510) 286-5543.

Sincerely,



TONY TAVARES  
District Director