

Unit: **Customer Services**

Section: **3**

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Procedure: **396**

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## **POLICY & PROCEDURES MANUAL**

### **Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department**

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**Category:** Key Business

#### **Policy Name: Geocaching**

It shall be the policy of the Parks and Recreation Department to encourage positive use of its parks and resources. Geocaching can be a positive recreational activity when practiced under established conditions and procedures.

#### **Procedures:**

Geocaching is initiated by an individual hiding a cache, (normally a waterproof container with small items inside) then recording the location with a Global Positioning Unit (GPS). The individual then posts the GPS coordinates along with a description of the cache on a Geocaching website. Other individuals then try to find the cache. When it is located, participants sign a logbook, then may take or leave a small memento item within the cache. The following procedures shall apply to the placement, discovery and management of geocaches.

1. A permit is not required for placing or searching for geocaches within Santa Clara County Parks, unless it is done in groups of more than 20 people.
2. Placing and searching for geocaches may only take place during normal park hours in park areas open to the public.
3. Caches must be registered on the Internet with Geocaching.com.
4. Caches must comply with all guidelines established with Geocaching.com.
5. All caches must be clearly labeled either on the exterior or within as a "Geocache" and include a note describing the activity to an unintentional finder.
6. Contact information for the owner must be included in the cache.
7. Containers for caches must be of a "neutral" nature so as not to cause alarm or concern. Examples of inappropriate containers are: unmarked tubes, ammunition

- boxes which have not been painted with clear “Geocache” markings, containers marked “biohazard or hazardous material” or similar, suspicious-looking containers.
8. Caches must not be placed so that they encourage the development of new unofficial or “volunteer” trails.
  9. Caches must not be placed in locations that will encourage erosion or trail damage, or further than 50 feet from the edge of a designated trail.
  10. Caches may not be buried or located within a water body.
  11. Cutting or modification of vegetation is prohibited.
  12. Modification of geographical features is prohibited.
  13. Altering park signs, fences, posts, trails, trail markers, park buildings, or facilities is prohibited.
  14. Caches may not be placed on or near potentially hazardous locations.
  15. Caches must not interfere with wildlife or other park visitors.
  16. Caches may not contain inappropriate, hazardous or illegal materials such as flammables, explosives, controlled substances, pornography or food.
  17. Caches may not be located on or in park buildings or structures or within designated historic or cultural resource areas.
  18. Caches must be maintained by the owner. Caches that have been abandoned and not maintained will be considered litter and removed.
  19. The Department reserves the right to remove any cache that has been determined to be inappropriate either in location or content, hazardous, or has a negative impact to other park visitors, park neighbors, wildlife, or natural or cultural resources. In the event a cache is removed by Department staff, attempts may be made to notify the owner of the cache, however it is not a requirement nor a responsibility.

### **Geocache Management:**

A member of Geocachers of the Bay Area will be selected to serve as a volunteer liaison for the Department to assist in the management of geocaches within County Parks. This volunteer liaison will be required to register with Santa Clara County Parks as a volunteer and will work with park staff to identify and remove inappropriate geocaches when they are identified.

### **Procedures for Removal of Caches**

When a problem geocache is identified by park users or park staff, the geocache liaison will attempt to contact the cache owner and resolve the problem. If the problem cannot be resolved or the cache owner cannot be contacted, then the cache will be removed.

In the event a cache is abandoned by the owner, it may be removed. An "abandoned cache" is one that (1) needs maintenance or replacement, or that needs to be moved and (2) is not receiving appropriate attention in a timely manner.

If a cache is a hazard (draws people to a dangerous cliff or to posted off limits areas, etc.) it should be removed and archived as soon as practical.

#### **Procedure for Geocache Volunteer Liaison:**

1. If a geocache volunteer liaison discovers that a cache has a compliance issue, they should notify the Department's Volunteer Program Coordinator.
2. The geocache volunteer liaison will inform the cache owner of the compliance issue.
3. If the compliance issue is not resolved in a timely manner, the geocache volunteer liaison will take steps to resolve the situation.
4. If a cache is physically removed from a park due to this procedure, the geocache volunteer liaison, or their designee, will take reasonable steps to inform the cache owner, and return the cache to the owner.
5. If the cache owner cannot be identified or contacted after reasonable attempt has been made, the cache will be discarded as trash.

#### **Procedure for Park Staff:**

1. If park staff discover compliance issue regarding a cache that is an immediate hazard to life, property or endangered species they are authorized to immediately remove the cache.
2. Park staff are encouraged to return any removed items to the Department's Volunteer Program Coordinator. The Volunteer Program Coordinator in turn, should inform the Geocache volunteer liaison, who will take reasonable steps to inform the cache owner and to return the cache to the owner.
3. If park staff find a compliance issue regarding a cache that does not require immediate resolution, they should inform the Volunteer Program Coordinator, who should then inform the Geocache volunteer liaison of the compliance issue for resolution.