



# Program Provides a Safe Place to Report Hate Crimes

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It is not uncommon for businesses to display several decals in their front windows, maybe something from a security company or a local chamber of commerce. In some 130-plus cities in the United States, businesses also display a rainbow decal that includes the words “Safe Place.”

The city of San Jose, Calif., and its police department recently

joined that group as a member of the Safe Place program that originated in Seattle in 2015. Seattle's Safe Place program originally focused on LGBT hate crimes, but later expanded to include all types of hate crimes. With its success, the Seattle Police Department created a program-specific website and began encouraging other departments to join.



The program sounds simple: police departments recruit businesses and train their employees on how to provide a safe place for victims of hate crimes to get help with reporting, then allow those businesses to display the Safe Place decal. The San Jose Police Department expects the program to pay huge dividends, not only in additional reports of hate crimes but also with an improved perception that San Jose is a community that cares about people's safety.

“When a city has really strong adoption and someone walking along the street sees a lot of these stickers, it lets them know that this a community and a police department that cares and

that takes hate crimes seriously,” says Officer James Gonzales, program coordinator. “It creates a sense of security that if something does happen, you will receive help. This tells people that if something terrible does happen to them, we will do something about it.”

San Jose’s participation in the program started in August with about 70 Starbucks and Wells Fargo locations as the original partners; those two businesses already participated in the program in other cities. As soon as the word got out, Gonzales says, SJPD began getting applications from credit unions, schools, nail parlors, ice cream shops and many other businesses. Participants must sign an agreement indicating that at least two employees are on duty during all hours the business is open, and that one will contact 911 while the other remains with the victim, making him or her comfortable. All employees must receive training in these procedures before the police department will accept the business as a partner.

“Seattle has worked hard to make sure that participating cities use a consistent method and consistent training,” Gonzales says. “They warned us that there might be a spike in reported hate crimes, not because the actual rate increased but rather because people feel more comfortable reporting when they know the program exists.”

He adds that businesses can perform the training on their own, using materials provided by the police department, or the SJPD

will provide onsite training on request.

“We’re not expecting a flood of individuals coming into businesses and reporting crimes, but it’s important that employees receive the proper training on how to react if someone does come in. It’s more likely the police department will receive an increased volume of reports through traditional channels because residents know that this is a city that will respond,” Gonzales says.

Because San Jose wanted to be perceived as a city that will respond, its community advisory board had looked at a number of existing initiatives before deciding to deploy Safe Place. Although it’s too soon to statistically measure results, Gonzales says the department believes it is already improving community relations.

The Safe Place concept is specifically intended to be managed by local law enforcement, not the participating businesses or community organizations. It also includes an optional anti-bullying initiative. To learn more, visit [here](#).

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