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Death comes amid other problems at Tunitas Creek Beach

By Clay Lambert Jul 20, 2016

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There was a tragedy along Coastside sands over the weekend, and it points to a growing problem along one remote stretch of coastline that seems to be attracting more than its share of visitors.

Long after midnight on Friday, 34-year-old Francisco Zarco-Lopez drowned. Authorities say the San Jose resident was at the beach with friends and family. They say that at about 3 a.m. he waded into the water where he was apparently dragged off his feet by a wave that may have caught him by surprise.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to the Zarco-Lopez family. It is a terrible thing to get a call in the night that a loved one is gone.

His death should now be a catalyst to make that stretch of beach safer for visitors and locals alike. While we don't conflate Zarco-Lopez's tragic death with other reported problems of late on the beach, we would honor his memory by doing something about those problems.

It's been more than a year since we first began to hear from people who frequent the area that Tunitas Creek Beach had become a venue for parties organized over the hill and far and wide. While that in and of itself isn't a problem — the beach, after all, belongs to all of us — the trash and commotion sure are.

Service-oriented locals, including those working with the Pacifica Beach Coalition, have been making regular treks to the beach to clean up after people without the good sense to do so themselves. Because it's remote, there are no services — no trashcans, no restrooms. Apparently,

some of our less evolved visitors take that to mean dump your, well, stuff wherever you like and leave it there. Perhaps they think all that garbage — and some weekends there is a monumental pile of it — creates habitat when it's swept out to sea. Or something.

San Mateo County has taken steps to make the area less attractive to overnights who get drunk and rowdy. Online message boards mentioning the beach bemoan the parking tickets visitors have gotten and the fact that authorities have given out tickets for having alcohol on the beach. Maybe, in light of this weekend's tragedy, we need more of that.

Our beaches are true jewels. We do not want to gate them off with deputies and rangers every 50 feet. Part of the attraction is the wildness and the sense that you are in nature. But that doesn't mean they are free-for-all zones.

It seems a fitting tribute to Zarco-Lopez would be working to find the right balance so that all of us can enjoy Tunitas Creek Beach without stepping on glass or having our cars burglarized or much worse.