

# How to write your own San Francisco ‘doom loop’ story: An essential guide for visiting APEC writers



We’d like to extend a hearty San Francisco welcome to our 2,000 media colleagues from around the world descending on the city [for the APEC summit](#) beginning this week.

We know your editor who spends too much time doom-scrolling social media has assigned you to write an opus about the state of San Francisco — and we’re here to help.

You can write about a community that [learned from its 1918-19 pandemic mistakes](#) — emerging from the coronavirus shutdown with [one of the lowest COVID death rates](#) of any major U.S. city. Or about [the thriving neighborhoods](#), and [the ambitious expansion](#) of an already amazing parks system.

You can write about the Pride rally towels with the colors of the transgender flag [at the last Golden State Warriors home game](#), and that nobody said a damned thing, because we love and defend our own against culture war nonsense. (The NBA just announced [we’re hosting its 2025 All-Star Game!](#) Will a drag queen please sing the national anthem?)

Ha, who are we kidding?! You’re here to write the millionth story about the San Francisco doom loop, the much publicized (including at least 100 times by the Chronicle) and hotly debated theory that a city that endured proudly through the 1906 earthquake and fire, AIDS crisis, Zodiac killer, one tech boom-and-bust and the band Starship will be completely undone by ... high commercial vacancy rates.



But we get it. A story declaring “80 square blocks of San Francisco have very serious crises and the rest of the city is pretty great” isn’t going to mollify your boss, whose view of San Francisco’s demise is based solely on Elon Musk’s tweets. Time is tight and you want to hit the sushi bar at the new rooftop Chotto Matte restaurant after deadline.

So to help our out-of-town media colleagues, we offer you your very own “Cut-and-Paste San Francisco-Doom-Loop Story.” We’ve done this before for our visiting media pals, and expect the same courtesy when your city becomes a daily punching bag for Fox News.



### Step 1: Fly into San Francisco International Airport

Do not leave the airport. Go directly to Lark Creek Grill near Gate D in Terminal 2 and [order the “David Brooks Special.”](#) If they do not bring you a cheeseburger and an \$80 bottle of wine, ask for that. Share your \$108 bill on social media as a sign of the demise of the economy specifically and mankind in general.

(Then turn off social media and wait eight hours to check in again. [We’re sure it will go over well!](#))

### Step 2: Head to downtown San Francisco

The good news: The fastest way into downtown is the cheapest — a BART ride that starts at \$3.75 for disabled passengers and seniors.

The bad news: The ride itself will blow your narrative about San Francisco transit as a post-apocalyptic people mover where no one is ever safe. The number of delays related to police actions has [dropped precipitously](#) since May, even if ridership is still [about 43%](#) of what it was pre-pandemic. (More good news: They just replaced all [the Richard Nixon-era cars](#) with new ones, so you have a better shot at getting a seat without a mysterious stain on it.)



Since you likely won't get face time with a real international ambassador while in town for APEC, you can interview a [BART ambassador](#). Who might actually have better climate change ideas.

### Step 3: Locate your doom loop Deep Throat

Want a primary source [for your lede](#) who is deeply, passionately concerned about the doom loop? Then you'd better leave the actual doom loop. Make travel plans (or — who are we kidding — schedule a quick Zoom call) to Glen Ellen, Lake Tahoe, Kauai or [California Forever\\*](#), where the most opinionated tech leaders are cowering in their Wine Country/waterfront weekend palaces, fear-mongering from a safe distance about what's going on outside the empty office they haven't visited in three years.

(\*Under construction ... [maybe](#).)



### Step 4: Visit the ultimate landmark for San Francisco's failure

And that is [the shuttered Nordstrom inside the former Westfield mall at Fifth and Market streets](#). Ignore the fact that Bloomingdales, Macy's and Neiman Marcus are still open mere steps away for anyone who wants to spend \$140 on a scarf. An already dying mall dying some more was the city's [Thanos snap moment](#).

But don't think of it as a half-empty concrete carcass that symbolizes a dying downtown, think of it as San Francisco Mayor London Breed does: a [soccer stadium](#). Even though there is no team, no potential owner and nobody willing to invest a dime in converting the former home of a Nordstrom, Victoria's Secret and Chipotle Mexican Grill into an international fútbol palace.

(At least she's still trying! And while soccer will never happen, [Mark Hogan's Legoland idea](#) is very real.)

### Step 5: Did you walk by a closed Walgreens? Blame the doom loop!



And shoplifting! Because a business that runs on volume sales of Arizona Iced Tea and [trusted its future to Elizabeth Holmes](#) would never close [for any other reason](#) except “It’s San Francisco’s fault!”

### Step 6: Here is where to set up your doom loop live shot

This is for our TV colleagues who want a live shot in front of San Francisco’s iconic Painted Ladies/“[Full House](#)” [picnic ground](#). Pro tip: Don’t do that live shot too far from your news van. It will likely be cleaned out if you’re away from it for more than 15 minutes.

The good news: Then you can do a first-person, “I Went to APEC And All My Stuff Got Stolen in San Francisco” story that will be far more compelling than trying to figure out what exactly APEC is and explaining it to your audience. [CNN does it](#) all the time when they’re in town.

(But seriously, DO NOT LEAVE ANYTHING IN YOUR RENTAL CAR! It *will* get ripped off. And we mean nothing. Not a sweater. Not a pack of gum. And definitely not the APEC swag bag you snagged in violation of your outlet’s ethics policy.)



### Step 7: Here is where NOT to set up your San Francisco doom loop live shot

When trashing the Tenderloin, be sure you’re not actually standing in Lower Nob Hill.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, in town for a high-dollar fundraiser, chose the [corner of Geary Boulevard and Hyde Street](#) to film his on-the-scene Tenderloin horror story, decrying that he witnessed “so much riff-raff running around” — while standing one block from a fine dining establishment [with a \\$71 grass-fed ribeye steak](#) and two blocks from \$4,700 per month condominiums [that currently have a wait list](#).

### Step 8: Line up your political/tech/celebrity doom loop secondary sources



- Famous San Franciscans who will pick up the phone: Willie Brown, Matt Haney, London Breed (for publications with circulation 250,000 and over), Gary Tan, Ron Conway, literally anyone from GrowSF, Supervisors Aaron Peskin and Matt Dorsey.
- Famous San Franciscans who won't pick up the phone: Gavin Newsom, Danny Glover, Jello Biafra, Steph Curry, any member of Metallica or Train, Grateful Dead musician Bob Weir. (Weir may pick up the phone, but he'll think the doom loop is a strain of weed.)

#### Addendum: How to find Willie Brown

We know every East Coast reporter is contractually obligated to quote the former San Francisco mayor in every California-related political story. It's not hard to find Willie, even if you don't have his number. Just call Sam's Grill & Seafood Restaurant ([established 1867](#)) between 12:30 and 2 p.m. Imagine a rotary phone with a very long cord being passed to him on a silver platter.



#### Step 9: Bend the knee to the doom loop king

Your doom loop story isn't complete if you're not quoting people who don't vote in San Francisco. And by "quote" we mean scroll through their X feeds. And by "X feeds" we mean Elon Musk. Choose one of these apocalyptic, lightly researched Musk quotes for your opus:

1. *"So many stores shuttered in downtown SF. Feels post-apocalyptic."* Read that again, this time after taking another bite of roast chicken [from Zuni Cafe](#), located at 1 Doom Loop Road, a [nine-minute walk](#) from Elon's Twitter/X headquarters.
2. *"Many people I know have been severely assaulted. Violent crime in SF is horrific and even if attackers are caught, they are often released immediately."* (No, [violent crime is lower](#) in San Francisco than in most big cities.)

3. *“Many have offered rich incentives for X (fka Twitter) to move its HQ out of San Francisco. Moreover, the city is in a doom spiral with one company after another left or leaving. Therefore, they expect X will move too. We will not. You only know who your real friends are when the chips are down. San Francisco, beautiful San Francisco, though others forsake you, we will always be your friend.”*

With friends like Elon, who needs a doom loop?

### **Step 10: Find the missing office workers**

One of the driving factors behind the doom loop scenario is that about one-third of San Francisco’s office space is empty. That’s because San Francisco’s technorati figured out during the pandemic that they didn’t have to come to the office to actually go to work. But some tech companies [are coming back](#), while other investors [bet on a return](#). And [Levi’s Plaza](#) has new tenants, just like it was 1993 and the dot-com boom!

So ... it’s complicated. Follow [the Chronicle’s Laura Waxmann](#) for the latest. (Or just take a photo of a shuttered Super Duper Burger on Montgomery Street, caption it “See, San Francisco is over!” and call it a day.)

### **Step 11: Not sure if San Francisco is really over? Pose it as a question!**

The most crucial part of doom loop reporting is leaving yourself an out, on the chance that San Francisco will innovate or toil its way out of its latest crisis — just like it has [the 37 other times people said San Francisco is “over.”](#)

The best way to do that? Unanswerable questions. Questions that are shameless click-bait headlines, but don’t require you to do any reporting.

*“Is San Francisco dying?”*

*“What happened to San Francisco? Is America’s most beautiful city now a decrepit corpse?”*

*“Has dystopian hellhole San Francisco lost the very last shred of its soul?”*

*“Help! I’m trapped in San Francisco (in a \$400 a night hotel room) and I can’t get out! (How can I make this into a question?)”*

And to your editor: *“Why are we writing this again?”*

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