

Thieves hit Union Square luxury stores in wild rampage



San Francisco police said they arrested 8 suspects — all young adults — after responding to theft and vandalism at retail stores in the Union Square area on Friday night. Videos posted to social media showed many people running out of the Louis Vuitton store with merchandise.

San Francisco police chief Bill Scott said at a news conference Saturday that he is “confident that more arrests will be made” as investigations continue and police review video footage of the crimes. He added that some of the individuals arrested were already known to police.

Scott said the burglaries were a “concerted effort” but stopped short of calling it organized crime.

In addition to the arrests, police seized two vehicles and two firearms, Scott said, adding that police were “confronting armed individuals” last night.

Stores burglarized included Louis Vuitton in Union Square, Burberry and Bloomingdales in the Westfield mall, Jin’s Eyewear on Powell Street, Maxford’s Jewelry, Yves Saint Laurent and Walgreens on Market Street, Scott said. Police stopped burglaries at Fendi — though the store was still damaged — and Hermes on Grant Avenue. Scott added that some cannabis dispensaries around the city were also hit Friday night.

Police recovered thousands of dollars of merchandise, the chief said, but the total amount of damage is still under investigation.

Supervisor Aaron Peskin, whose district includes Union Square, said police and merchants told him that eight stores in the greater area suffered damage, including luxury retailers Yves St. Laurent and Fendi.

Marisa Rodriguez, executive director of the Union Square Alliance, a merchants group for the area, said that vandals broke into the Westfield San Francisco Center mall and targeted Burberry, as well as Moncler, a boutique within Bloomingdale’s. Balenciaga and Jin’s were two other Union Square locations also hit, she said.

SFPD was expecting unrest in the wake of the Kyle Rittenhouse verdict in Wisconsin and had stationed extra officers into the night, Peskin said.

“This was bad elements using the Rittenhouse decision as an excuse for plundering San Francisco businesses,” he said. “It’s a lame excuse; there’s no justification.”

Louis Vuitton San Francisco, Union square got cleared out!! pic.twitter.com/7Sz6rlRo8n
— Da Juan (@CARLITOSGUEY) November 20, 2021

Videos posted to social media show crowds of people running out of the Louis Vuitton store on the corner of Geary and Stockton with armloads of merchandise that was allegedly stolen from the premises.

One video showed San Francisco police officers running after people, using what appeared to be batons to repeatedly strike the windows of a vehicle. Police could be seen pulling someone out of the vehicle and apparently attempting to cuff the person.

Scott said he stood by the tactics used by police officers, calling the suspects “dangerous.”

“These people will stop at nothing to get away,” he said.

Louis Vuitton San Francisco, Union square got cleared out!! pic.twitter.com/7Sz6rlRo8n
— Da Juan (@CARLITOSGUEY) November 20, 2021

San Francisco police told The Chronicle that officers responded to a report of “possible looting” and vandalism at retail stores in the Union Square area at 8:10 p.m. and said they saw “several suspects involved in criminal acts.” Police said they arrested the suspects over the next four hours.

“The police department did a great job and it could have been significantly worse if not for their presence,” Peskin said. “They made good arrests.”

I'm outraged by the looting in Union Square last night. We are seeing similar crimes across the country. I have a simple message: don't bring that noise to our City.

Great work by SFPD.

Standby for felony charges.

— Chesa Boudin 博徹思 (@chesaboudin) November 20, 2021

“We are continuing to respond to other retail establishments where reports of vandalism are occurring,” San Francisco police said. “Additional officers are responding to the area and are mobilizing to address the fluid and evolving situation.”

Anyone with information should contact police at [415-575-4444](tel:415-575-4444) or may text a tip to TIP411 and start the message with “SFPD.”

The Louis Vuitton in San Francisco union square just got emptied out pic.twitter.com/Imi6qbL0i1
— Yealenne (@Yealenne) November 20, 2021

Bunch of ppl stealing Louis Vuitton merchandise tonight in downtown San Francisco at the LV store in Union Square. pic.twitter.com/qLoYtIVeiM

— Asian Crime Report (@activeasian) November 20, 2021

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S.F. Mayor Breed declares state of emergency in the Tenderloin



San Francisco Mayor [London Breed](#) declared a state of emergency in the Tenderloin Friday, allowing city officials to bypass some bureaucratic hurdles as they try to stem a tide of fatal overdoses and street crime.

The declaration would allow city officials to suspend rules around zoning, planning codes and contracts, enabling them to quickly set up a “linkage” facility that offers shelter, mental health and hygiene to people suffering from addiction. Breed took similar steps to expedite San Francisco’s response to the pandemic, which raised her national profile.

Her announcement Friday comes days after Breed unveiled a plan for the downtown neighborhood, ramping up funding for police overtime and infrastructure, such as public toilets, while adding social workers and outreach staff to lure more people into treatment — or jail those who refuse.

Critics, including the public defender and harm-reduction advocates who work with people who use drugs, were quick to slam her plan for more policing.

Supervisor Matt Haney, who has advocated for an emergency declaration for two years, supported the Friday announcement.

He said he backs more community policing in the Tenderloin to address drug dealing, but told *The Chronicle* he did not want to criminalize those using drugs.

More than 700 people died of a drug overdose last year — a city record. This year is on track to be almost as deadly. Nearly a quarter of overdose deaths during those two years [occurred in the Tenderloin](#).

Breed called the conditions on the streets “heartbreaking” during a Friday news conference.

“Too many people are dying in this city. Too many people are sprawled out all over our streets, and now we have a plan to address it,” Breed said inside City Hall Friday, flanked by Haney, Police Chief Bill Scott and leaders in charge of the city’s behavioral health and emergency response.

She said there's clearly a "crisis" in the Tenderloin and "we need to respond accordingly."

The mayor said "the goal is to not let anyone stay out in the streets." That echoed what Breed had said Tuesday — that people using drugs in public and breaking other laws would either have a choice to go to the linkage center or to jail.

After stressing on Tuesday that police would be enforcing laws against drug dealing and open-air drug use, Breed went one step further Friday by saying that the city would enforce "many of our various laws" including a sit/lie ordinance, camping and sleeping. Those often affect people who are homeless, not just those using drugs.

"We are going to be a lot more aggressive with implementing the existing laws on the books in order to get people off the streets," she said.

Enforcing all laws may not mean immediate arrest or jail. For example, police can issue a ticket or misdemeanor citation under [the sit/lie city ordinance](#) that prohibits sitting or lying on city streets. An offender gets a fine or community service on the first offense. If there's a second offense within 24 hours, the person could also face up to 10 days of jail time.

When asked whether enforcement would also impact people who are homeless, but not using drugs, Breed's spokesperson Jeff Cretan said "the plan is to try to focus on the people who need help getting to services by using the existing laws to help them make the decision to go get help."

"We will work to bring people into housing," he said. "We need to be clear that when we offer people help and services, they need to take them."

Advocates for the homeless have said the city doesn't have enough shelter beds or long-term housing for the unhoused.

Officials said that the city spends more on social services and police overtime in the Tenderloin than any other neighborhood.

In one sense, Friday's move seems to represent a shift in approach for Breed. Her office pushed back against advocates in October who wanted her to declare a citywide state of emergency for the opioid crisis.

They argued that declaring such an emergency would help the city open a site where people could use drugs under medical supervision.

At the time, the mayor's spokesperson said that it wasn't clear how doing so "could practically allow us to do anything we cannot already do today."

Breed's policy director Andres Power said Friday that the local emergency allowed the city to override only city laws, not state or federal laws that currently ban supervised drug-use sites, which is what advocates wanted.

The mayor said last month that she's moving ahead with plans to open a supervised drug-use site despite concerns about its legality.

Breed said her team worked with the city attorney over the past two months on the declaration. Power told The Chronicle that the city didn't want to declare a state of emergency without having a plan first.

Gary McCoy, director of policy and public affairs at HealthRight 360, an addiction treatment provider, is concerned that the emergency declaration is being used to support her plan for more policing in the neighborhood, which could criminalize people with substance use disorders before resources such as the supervised drug-use site or a planned drug sobering center open.

"It feels like we're sort of stepping back into the failed war on drugs," he said. "A lot of things need to happen before immediately providing people with the choice of going to jail or accepting the little options that are available."

While Breed is planning an expansion of treatment beds, fewer than a quarter of those in the pipeline have been added.

Haney was quick to point out that he has been pushing this idea for years, sponsoring a board resolution in 2019 and following up with a more specific version a few months ago.

"For me, this is about confronting a public health epidemic with a public health response that matches what we are seeing," he said. "I have argued that this is a tool that we have had."

Board of Supervisors President Shamann Walton said Friday morning that the supervisors would meet to ratify the emergency next week, although he did not have an exact time or date yet.

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D.A. Chesa Boudin joins critics of Breed's Tenderloin crackdown to protest plan



District Attorney Chesa Boudin joined other elected officials and activists Monday to criticize Mayor London Breed's plan to flood San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood with police and crack down on drug dealers as well as people who use drugs in the open.

Breed announced a series of initiatives last week, including asking for overtime spending for police, seeking more social workers and public toilets for the Tenderloin, and [declaring a state of emergency](#) there. Breed said the city will continue to offer services and housing to people on the street and those struggling with addiction but will get tough on those who refuse shelter and treatment.

Boudin, Board of Supervisors President Shamann Walton and Public Defender Mano Raju said at a news conference Monday that the plan was flawed because it relied on failed policies to deal with problems.

The leaders and professionals who provide addiction treatment or harm-reduction services called for the mayor to quickly ramp up "evidence-based" alternatives, including treatment, housing, education and jobs. The city has been chronically short on treatment beds for the thousands of people who suffer from homelessness, addiction and mental illness.



Boudin’s decision to join the news conference underscores the fact that while many city leaders agree on the biggest challenges facing San Francisco, they have fundamental disagreements about how to solve them. While leaders are divided about the best way forward, some Tenderloin residents and business owners have been pleading for safer and cleaner streets for months in the face of shootings and open-air drug use.

Boudin said during the news conference that he is “outraged” at the human suffering, flagrant violations of laws and safety concerns faced by families in the Tenderloin. But he also said, “We can’t arrest and prosecute our way out of problems that are afflicting the Tenderloin.

“Arresting people who are addicted to drugs, jailing people who have mental health struggles, putting folks who are vending hot dogs or other food on the streets in cages will not solve these problems, and they are certainly not the only tools available,” he said.

[Past city reports](#) have shown nearly three-quarters of people in jail struggled with substance use and mental illness, and nearly one-third were homeless. Boudin said the city lacked enough treatment and housing, with some inmates waiting months to get into rehabilitation programs, and urged more investment into mental health care and opening a supervised drug-use site.

“Right now in San Francisco it’s easier to get high than it is to get help. That has to change,” he said. “I will do everything in my power to make the Tenderloin safe for all of San Francisco.”

Boudin noted that his office has been “prosecuting drug sales and possession with intent to sell at higher rates than my predecessor in 2018 and 2019” and plans to continue enforcing the law.

Asked whether he would prosecute drug users, he said possession is a misdemeanor, meaning someone arrested for the crime is given a citation, then told to come to court. He said that given “what we know about addiction, the chances of those people even showing up to court is very small,” reflecting that the approach wasn’t a “useful response” to a public health crisis.



Boudin said his focus was on serious and violent crimes, especially with limited court capacity under the pandemic.

“The last thing we need is to clog up every available court with a misdemeanor possession-of-a-pipe charge,” he said.

The police chief, sheriff and Supervisors Ahsha Safaí and Catherine Stefani stood beside Breed last week when she pledged to give people who use drugs on the streets the option to go to a yet-to-be-set up linkage center where the city will provide referrals to treatment and shelter — or go to jail.

Breed warned Friday that the city would “be a lot more aggressive with implementing the existing laws on the books in order to get people off the streets,” including a controversial city ordinance that prohibits people from lying or sitting on sidewalks, which usually affects homeless people.

Her administration is working on adding more resources: The city has approved buying or leasing nearly 1,200 of the 1,500 permanent supportive housing units planned [over the next two years](#). It has also opened 87 [substance use and mental health treatment beds](#) — just under a quarter of those planned under a law to reform the city’s behavioral health system. A [drug sobering center](#) and a [supervised drug-consumption site](#) where people would be able to use drugs under medical professionals’ care are planned for next year.

Critics said these interventions and more are needed.

Walton said the board had urged the mayor to declare a state of emergency for the overdose crisis — not “increase law enforcement budgets here in San Francisco and arrest people who use drugs when we currently don’t have adequate resources to address their needs.”

The board will hold a special meeting to decide whether to ratify the mayor’s emergency declaration, which would lift bureaucratic barriers so the city can quickly open the linkage site and start police enforcement in full force, at 2 p.m. Thursday. Walton told The Chronicle he hadn’t decided how he would vote, and didn’t know the votes of his 10 colleagues, but wanted to “explore alternatives to what was being proposed.”

Supervisor Matt Haney supports the mayor’s emergency declaration. He told The Chronicle last week he supports policing to go after the drug supply, but not criminalizing users.

“I don’t support putting people in jail or prison because they’re addicted,” said Haney, who didn’t join Monday’s news conference.

Instead, he said he wants to “get people inside” with alternatives such as the supervised drug-use site and sobering center, treatment, and a massive increase in street outreach workers to connect people with help.

Del Seymour, a Tenderloin community member for 35 years, said during Monday’s news conference that getting arrested 12 times in the late 1990s “made me no less of a dope fiend until I got drug rehab.”

Todd Meshekey, sitting on the corner of Jones and Turk streets Monday, said, “We need police,” but was skeptical that flooding the neighborhood would make a difference in his personal struggles or the neighborhood’s issues.

“It’s impossible,” he said. “Drugs have been here before us, they’ll be here after us. Why should they keep bothering us?”

Meshekey said he uses methamphetamine and marijuana and has been homeless for 20 years across the country, 15 in San Francisco. He said he’s been arrested and incarcerated in every city, but that San Francisco’s approach was more lax.

“In other cities you can’t do what we’re doing right now,” he said, before puffing from a pipe.

Meshekey said he doesn’t want to keep using drugs, which he said have messed up his life, and that he has stopped before, but said recovery is a “long road.”

The former restaurant server said his New Year’s plan is to get a job and “change everything.”

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Editor’s note: A previous version of this story misstated District Attorney Chesa Boudin’s stance on prosecuting drug dealers. He supports prosecuting drug dealers.

What have police been doing in the Tenderloin until now? Residents say not a whole lot



Mary Jane De Castro is used to [pushing past drug dealers](#) as she walks her kids home from school. She's used to the dealers crowding around her apartment building's front gate each evening, making it difficult to come and go. She's used to the sounds of gunshots ringing out at all hours.

But De Castro, a 40-year-old mother of four, still can't understand why Tenderloin police officers seem to do so little about crime in the neighborhood where drug dealing is rampant, gun violence has spiked, and families and children are terrified.

Earlier this year, she was wheeling a cart of dirty clothes to a nearby Laundromat when strangers kicked her cart, screamed at her and punched her in the head. Shaking and crying, she hustled into the nearby police station to report what had just happened.

She said an officer took her information, but nobody darted out to find the culprits. The officer said he'd alert others in the field, but she didn't see or hear him make that call. Dejected, she left the station — and said she never heard another word from police.

"I love the police. I trust them," said the native of the Philippines who's lived on Golden Gate Avenue for 11 years. "But the time that I needed them, they're not there."

It's a common sentiment of crime witnesses and victims around the city — such as the owner of a burglarized cannabis shop who [recently shared a video with The Chronicle](#) of police responding to a 911 call about a break-in but appearing to stand by as the final suspect exited the building and drove away.

Still, it's perhaps most confounding in the Tenderloin, a neighborhood packed with kids, seniors and low-income immigrants. Where, many residents wonder, are the police?

It's an even bigger question now that Mayor London Breed has answered Tenderloin families' pleas for help by [vowing to flood the neighborhood with police officers](#) working overtime. While it's good she's paying attention to residents' concerns, it's unclear what paying police to work longer hours will accomplish if it's so difficult to see the fruits of their regular shifts.

The Police Department is understaffed by nearly 500 officers, according to [a recent study of adequate staffing for the department](#) commissioned by former Supervisor Norman Yee, also raising the question of whether the department can handle that many extra hours while also working overtime to guard high-end stores in Union Square in the wake of mass retail thefts there.

It doesn't appear the mayor has talked to District Attorney Chesa Boudin or San Francisco Superior Court Presiding Judge Samuel Feng about her new plan, raising the question of whether they'll provide the necessary cooperation to make increased arrests stick.

Asked whether Breed, Police Chief Bill Scott, Boudin and Feng have met in the past year, a mayor's spokesperson did not respond. Rachel Marshall, a spokesperson for Boudin, said that the four have never met to discuss public safety in the Tenderloin and that the mayor did not loop Boudin in on her plans.

Getting the mayor and the top leaders of the city's criminal justice system in one room seems like an obvious step. Surely none of them can be OK with the state of the Tenderloin, so what can they agree to do about it?

Asked about Tenderloin residents' complaints that police aren't responding to the neighborhood's rampant crime, Scott, the police chief, said anti-police sentiment following the country's racial reckoning last year has contributed to low morale and difficulty recruiting new officers.

He said there's a feeling among some officers that "the world is against them" and that they can't do their jobs effectively. He said some officers feel they're being told to make more arrests, but also scrutinized when they do make arrests, putting them in "a no-win position." That may be true, but officers still need to work hard and proactively while ensuring they treat everyone fairly and without unnecessary force.

Scott said that he adamantly agrees with that, noting he fully supports reform and accountability, but that crime still needs to be addressed.

"We need to find that balance," he said, adding he thinks societal feelings toward police are cyclical and may be swinging back to wanting more police presence.

He said that despite appearances, officers are working hard in the Tenderloin. Police statistics show Tenderloin officers have made 489 arrests for selling narcotics this year and have seized more than 23 kilos of fentanyl. Including seizures of cocaine, heroin, meth and pills, they've seized more than 48 kilos of drugs.

"There has been enforcement, but it's not enough," Scott said, "if people who live and work in that community aren't seeing a difference on the street."

Supervisor Matt Haney, who lives on Hyde Street, said he sees police all the time — but only in their cars and often driving right past "blatant, open drug dealing."

"We want police out of their cars and interacting with people," he said. "People here want safety, and they want a livable community."

I took an interest in Tenderloin families' calls for help when [I joined a group of them as they delivered a letter](#) to Breed last month. "We are the Tenderloin, and you have failed us," the letter read.

The mayor was in her office, according to her secretary, but didn't come out to meet with the kids. She did meet with Tenderloin families Friday afternoon at the Main Library, but didn't allow journalists to attend.

During the meeting, according to a recording by an attendee, Breed vowed a more aggressive approach to crime in the Tenderloin and said, "Open-air drug dealing is destroying our city. ... I know we're better than this."

She listened to heartbreaking stories from the families — including De Castro's account of getting hit in the head and police not appearing to help. Matt Dorsey, a spokesperson for the Police Department, said police cannot locate a report based on the information De Castro provided at the meeting. Tenderloin Capt. Chris Canning shared his e-mail address with her, Dorsey said, and is awaiting more information.

A man who lives in the Tenderloin told the mayor at the Friday meeting, "We have a police station in the middle of the Tenderloin and with all due respect to the captain and mayor, they're doing nothing." A woman in the neighborhood said, "When you call the police, they don't come. They say they are busy."

A woman speaking Spanish said through an interpreter that she called 911 after seeing a man with a gun outside a playground where her children were playing. She said she tried to tell the dispatcher what was going on in English, but that the dispatcher insisted she wait for a Spanish interpreter who took too long to respond.

Breed interrupted the woman and said she had to leave. "I've been here for over an hour," the mayor told the crowd. "I have something that's very important that I also have to take care of." She then left.

The mayor's spokesperson said she had an appointment, but did not provide details. He said she was scheduled to meet with the families for 30 minutes, but stayed far longer. Nevertheless, some people in the audience were not happy about her departure. A man can be heard in the recording shouting, "Very bad form, mayor!" Another person said, "We need help desperately!"

At a news conference Tuesday, Breed vowed that help is coming. She was clearly ticked off, even saying she would no longer tolerate "all the bulls— that has destroyed our city."

"It is time that the reign of criminals who are destroying our city comes to an end," she said.

Christy Shirilla, a community organizer with the Tenderloin Community Benefit District, said neighborhood residents broadly support more police foot patrols and appreciate Breed's attention to their neighborhood. She said they also want to see more cleaning in the evenings, a better response to 311 calls, more treatment options for people struggling with addiction and safer routes to walk to playgrounds.

De Castro said she's optimistic too, though on Saturday night, the day after the meeting with Breed, she returned home to find an ambulance in front of her apartment building and blood everywhere. Somebody had been shot.

"I hope the mayor will prioritize our problems," she said.

The attention is long overdue. But at least it's finally arrived.

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S.F. metro area retains No. 1 spot as most expensive place to live in the U.S. Here's how costs compare to rest of the nation



Prices in the San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley metropolitan statistical area were 17.4% higher than the national average, with apartment rents 107.4% higher, though rental data incorporated the year 2019 instead of 2020 because the pandemic disrupted housing data surveys. The New York-Newark-Jersey City region was second at 15.5% more expensive than the national average, followed by Honolulu at 13.8% higher and the San Diego area at 13.4% above the average. The regional price rankings weigh rental housing, goods, utilities and other expenses against the national average.

The Bay Area's high costs have soared even further this year amid global inflation and [supply chain gridlock](#). Gas prices have [leaped above \\$5 a gallon](#) and housing costs have rebounded as [renters have returned](#) to the region, a daunting challenge for both consumers and President Biden's administration.

California dominated the list of most expensive U.S. regions last year with 12 of the top 20 in the country, including seven in Northern California. California's 2019 housing costs were 60.2% higher than the national average, the highest of any state. The San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara MSA was fifth most expensive, with 2019 rent costs 130.6% higher than the national average, the most of any region. Los Angeles was seventh overall, Napa was 10th, Salinas was 12th, Santa Rosa-Petaluma was 16th, Santa Cruz-Watsonville was 18th and Vallejo was 20th.

The Sacramento area, where many Bay Area residents have flocked for relatively cheaper living costs, was 24th.

Data is based on a five-year rolling average of the Consumer Price Index and American Community Survey data from the Census Bureau. However, the 2020 American Community Survey was disrupted by the pandemic and results were delayed, so 2019 housing and utilities data was used, said Eric Figueroa, chief of regional prices branch at the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Thus, the report doesn't reflect the plunging rents across many cities including San Francisco during the pandemic. It may be updated next year after the agency analyzes [data released last month](#), he said.

The data shows that cost of living has major effects on the actual wealth of residents in the most expensive cities. For example, the report finds that San Francisco's \$111,000 income per person is actually worth closer to \$97,000 per person when adjusting for how much housing and goods cost.

Hawaii was the most expensive state with 12% higher prices than the national average, followed by New Jersey at 11.2% higher and California at 10.4%. Mississippi, West Virginia and Arkansas were the least expensive states. Florence-Muscle Shoals, Ala. was the least expensive region.

In 2020, consumer spending fell in 47 of 50 states, as measured by real personal consumption expenditures, as government lockdowns closed many businesses. The federal Bureau of Economic Analysis said that it was unclear how much the pandemic affected the statistics.

Real personal income, which accounts for cost of living, rose 5.3% nationally in 2020 and in all 50 states amid trillions of dollars in federal aid, including unemployment insurance expansions, with real personal income in California rising 7%. A booming stock market and tech companies going public in lucrative offerings in the past two years contributed to California's [lofty \\$75.7 billion budget surplus](#).

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