

Sand and Rock Landscape: Just Don't Take it from the Beach

By David Goldstein, Ventura County PWA, IWMD

Many people are rebuilding landscapes, and others are thinking about how to make their landscape less flammable. Add to this the people who want a landscape to use little water and create no waste, and you can see why sand and rock are popular choices.

This choice becomes a problem when people think they can take these resources from the beach. Kelly Saye, who lives in the Pierpont neighborhood of Ventura, recently photographed and reported to an officer a couple who backed their Ford F150 up to the beach and started loading it with boulders. As Saye noted, "This is very illegal and punishable by law. And it is super tacky."

She is right about the law. Tyson Butzke, a state park ranger, cited the California Code of Regulations, which bans gathering of any items, even shells, from beaches. Removing a rock is even worse. It is considered "tampering with geological features."

There are two exceptions. Occasionally, for safety reasons, park superintendents post orders and issue press releases authorizing cobble collectors to remove up to 5 pounds of rock per person per day at certain sites.

Also, with permission from the California Coastal Commission, state crews sometimes move sand so they can secure lifeguard towers and create clear paths to the ocean for lifeguards.

Local beaches need sand and rock and are eroding, partly because upstream blockages, such as the Matilija Dam, prevent shore replenishment, according to Paul Jenkin, Director of the Matilija Coalition. "Beaches come from river rocks and sand," said Jenkin.

Some people mistakenly think public agencies dump tons of rock on local beaches each winter, but they are actually seeing a natural ebb and flow. Rocks are exposed in the winter because of heavier waves, and sand flows in during the spring and summer, covering the rocks.

However, excessive sand can accumulate in some places. As part of a legal settlement, the city of Ventura clears sand regularly from the ends of the Pierpont lanes and fronts of 15 homes. However, this sand is not available to the public. Instead, again with permission from the Coastal Commission, the city uses it to enhance the beach by the Pier, at Surfers' Point, and at River Haven, according to Joe Yahner, Ventura's Environmental Sustainability Manager.

If you want to decorate with sand and rock, the only way to get it legally and without damaging the environment is to buy it from a landscape or rock crushing company.