

San Francisco is now POOP CITY as heroin needles, AIDS and corruption again define City



Tourists and shoppers make their way past a panhandler asleep outside a clothing store in San Francisco on Aug. 25. The streets of San Francisco have long reflected the eccentric city's governing priorities and many civic contradictions arising from the intersection of wealth and poverty. (Mason Trinca/For The Washington Post)

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SAN FRANCISCO — To the uninitiated, the bright-orange, Tic Tac-size specks scattered on the sidewalks, wedged into the openings of heating grates and piled in small mounds along curbs here are a bit of a mystery.

They are the sterile plastic caps to hypodermic needles, tossed aside by the scores of heroin addicts who dwell outside Twitter and Banana Republic and City Hall. The local government distributes them free to protect drug users from disease.



Dirty socks and syringe caps sit on the steps of the San Francisco Public Library. (Mason Trinca/For The Washington Post)

At the same time, the city has banned the use of another plastic item: the drinking straw.

The law's supporters say it will prevent a million straws a day from washing into the San Francisco Bay.

“Napkins, straws, and bags are available upon request,” reads a footnote on the menu of the Sentinel, a walk-up sandwich shop in the city's thriving financial district. “You can still get needles for free though. Welcome to SF.”

The streets of San Francisco — hilly, curvy, cinematic and, in recent years, a bleak showcase for the mentally ill and economically displaced — have long