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Residents mad over abandoned graffiti-covered train cars

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By Carol Ferguson, Eyewitness News November 17, 2010

ARVIN, Calif. -- Neighbors outside Arvin are fed up over graffiti-covered train cars that have been "parked" in their area for too long.

More than 30 rail cars sit on track along Tejon Highway, and neighbors say they're a magnet for crime.

"I don't know why they brought them here," Billy Abrego told Eyewitness News. "There's just graffiti that I don't like to see from my front yard. It's disgusting."

He's counted 38 cars, and though they're marked with "Amtrak" logos, these are not passenger rail cars. They appear to be cargo train cars.

"They look nasty like that," Esequiel Pantoja agreed. He works nearby. The cars sit along Tejon Highway, between Sunset Blvd. and Buena Vista Road. And, neighbors say they've been sitting there a long time.

"They've been here since November 14, 2008," Abrego said. He remembers the date, because that's his brother's birthday.

Neighbor Shartan Barrett agreed the train cars have probably been there for about two years. "It's a very bad eyesore," she said.

She worries the graffiti could be a sign of gang activity.

"Marking people's area and stuff like that," Barrett said. "This is a community and we don't need that."

Abrego said he spotted homeless people near one of the cars. He worries about that, and the possibility of gang activity.

"That open one, back in July, there was a lot of activity going on. I was going to call the Sheriff's Department, but I was afraid of retaliation."

Eyewitness News called Sheriff's spokesman Ray Pruitt. He said railroads have their own police, and they would deal with any crime or problems on the tracks.

Eyewitness News contacted Amtrak spokeswoman Vernae Graham in Oakland, and she responded by e-mail.

"Amtrak leased these cars that are now being stored at this location," Graham's e-mail reads. "We are no longer in the mail/express business -- therefore these cars are no longer in operation. In regards to your viewer's remarks, we will look into this matter and get back to you."

The questions viewers have include why the trains have to be "stored" along this road, and can they be

cleaned up, or moved.

Eyewitness News spotted at least three cars that appeared to be open, and in one there was litter.

Abrego said he's had enough. "I'd like the cars to go back where they belong."