

On the streets of San Francisco, a personal crusade to outline tragedy

By Harry Mok
The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — They look like the ghostly outlines of crime victims, and in a way, they are.

Wherever the city's streets have been marked by tragedy, Ken Kelton marks them over again. He spray-paints the silhouettes of crumpled pedestrians who were struck and killed by cars.

He considers it his own symbolic campaign against reckless driving, something he feels has already taken far too many lives.

"If there was a serial killer out there," Kelton said, by way of comparison, "everyone would be jumping into action."

So far, Kelton has made about 50 outlines. He'll keep at it, he said, until people take notice of the scourge in the streets.

"For a long time, I've been uncomfortable with the domination of the automobile," said Kelton, who works as a contractor. "A picture is worth a thousand words. I'm trying to underscore that this is life and death."

Authorities say 29 pedestrians have been killed in San Francisco since July 1, 1998. That's about an average year for the city and far below the 41 in 1997-98, according to Nick Carr, pedestrian and bicycle safety coordinator for the city's parking and traffic department.

"It's not a problem specific to San Francisco," Carr said. "It's a product of our time. There are longer commutes. People seem to be more competitive at the wheel and drive at increased speeds."

For years, Kelton said he "grumbled silently" about the deaths. When he heard about a New York man who was spray-painting spots where bicyclists were killed, he knew he'd found his calling.

On a map in his office, red pins represent pedestrian fatalities. Yellow pins mark injuries.

"He's always been passionate about things," said his wife, Sue. "When you look at the map, how can you not support it?"

Just after dawn one recent morning, Kelton hit the streets. Kelton donned an orange reflective vest, and his 23-year-old son, Jesse, erected a construction barrier nearby. It made them look like a road crew, giving them some cover.

Jesse Kelton lay a wood stencil of a human figure on the crosswalk at 21st and Mission streets for his father to paint over. Ken Kelton drew his paint gun and quickly painted "4-15-99, woman 71" above the stencil. Then he sprayed around the edges and over cutout



Photos by Pico van Houtryve, AP



For pedestrians: Ken Kelton, above, paints the outline of a body June 19 on a San Francisco corner where a pedestrian, 71, was killed. At left, Kelton uses a map and newspaper clipping to locate the site of a fatality.

letters that read: KILLED HERE, BY TRAFFIC. Last came his Web site address: www.pedsafe.org.

"A 71-year-old woman crossing the street," Kelton said in disgust. "Maybe she didn't cross in time. Is this what she deserves?"

The week afterward, a driver

made a wide turn onto a San Francisco street and hit a stroller, killing a 10-month-old boy on the way to the park with his mother.

Within days, the white outline of a body appeared on the pavement.

Ken Kelton's campaign continues.