

Homeless camp cleared

Deputies discover cabin, easy chairs and Tiki torches

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SANTA CRUZ — Used hypodermic needles, human waste, drug paraphernalia and moldy mattresses were hauled away in dump trucks Friday from a well-established homeless camp known for its criminal activity.

Protected with boots, long sleeves and two pairs of gloves, an 18-person crew with the Sheriff's Office scoured the wooded area between Carbonera Creek and the county government's Emeline Street complex for garbage generated by campers who made the area home.

Sheriff's officials said the campers, who had set up makeshift toilets and a cabin, were damaging the environment, a steep hillside of redwood, bay and oak trees, as well as presenting a safety hazard to the public.

No arrests were made, as the campers had cleared out before the crew arrived shortly after 8 a.m.

"There have been a couple of stabbings and a number of people involved in criminal activities (here)," said Sgt. Todd Liberty, who oversaw the cleanup. "There have been a lot of drug sales, and a number of people under the influence of drugs."

Sgt. Fred Plageman, a spokesman for the Sheriff's Office, said county coroners have been called to the area several times in recent years to recover bodies in and around the campsites. The deaths were attributed mostly to chronic alcohol or drug use, Plageman said.

Law enforcement officials had been warning campers for the past month that the sites would be dismantled.

Liberty said Friday's goal was not to displace the homeless but to encourage them to move to safer environments.

While sheriff's deputies were pleased with the effort, they note that there are numerous other encampments throughout the county that also pose hazards.

According to the 2005 Homeless Survey Census released in August, there are at least 3,371 homeless individuals in the county, and 79 percent are without shelter.

The lack of enough shelters forces people to camp, said Ken Cole, executive director of the Homeless Services Center.

"Clearing out the camps only moves the problem from one area to another, he added.



Sheriff's Sgt. Todd Liberty checks for inhabitants of a homeless camp not far from the county's government office complex on Emeline Street on Friday.

"Although the Police Department might have had good environmental and safety reasons (for dismantling the camp) the reality is there is no place for the homeless to go," he said. "There are not enough emergency shelters, not enough housing, not enough drug and alcohol treatment centers. What the police are doing is moving that problem onto another greenbelt area."

The most elaborate arrangement found at the encampment was near the creek.

A small wooden shack had been built at the base of the hillside. Although the camper had removed his possessions, he left a couch, several easy chairs and a Tiki torch outside the shack. He also left waste from a portable toilet he had set up about 10 feet from the creek.

A short distance away from the



Couches and easy chairs were among the items carted from the homeless camp Friday, which had been there for years. Deputies said inhabitants were warned of the sweep and that no one was there when deputies arrived.

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Camp

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make-shift latrine, crews collected drug paraphernalia.

Gerald Bosinger, who was assisting with the cleanup, was dismayed by the find.

"I fished this creek when I was a kid," he said, noting the drug waste poses a hazard to the current generation of youngsters. "Branciforte is just a quarter mile away, and kids come down here to explore."

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