

Cigarette machines banned

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

An ordinance banning cigarette machines in the unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County was approved unanimously this morning by county supervisors.

The ordinance comes less than two months after an identical law was approved by the Watsonville City Council.

The ban has been proposed in Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Capitola; the councils in those cities have yet to act.

Today's action was suggested by the county Public Health Commission and endorsed by the county Health Services Agency director.

The ban extends to cigarette machines in bars. Cigarette-

machine bans in some other cities and counties in California allow machines in bars.

Representatives from a dozen health agencies and anti-smoking groups voiced support for the ordinance today.

It's easy for youths to buy cigarettes from vending machines because "they feel they are unobserved," said Dr. Ira Lubell, the county's health officer.

The proponents cited various statistics that indicate most smokers start by age 14, and that they tend to buy from vending machines.

"It's pretty clear that tobacco is a 'gateway' drug," said Doug Fakkema, a member of the coun-

ty's Drug Abuse Commission. Youths who use tobacco, he said, "are more likely to go on to other drugs."

Jessica Lewis, a seventh-grader at Branciforte Junior High in Santa Cruz, urged passage of the ordinance because "I don't want to see my friends die" from the effects of smoking.

"Most of my friends smoke," Jessica said, adding that "they are not bad people."

When Supervisor Gary Patton asked her why her friends smoke, Jessica said, "They have a lot of problems at home. Their mothers and fathers hit them." Some who smoke, she said, "use it as an escape."

Two owners of vending-machine

companies objected to the law.

"I have a problem with blanket laws," said Robert Orcutt, owner of Valley Vending, who said cigarette machines make up 5 percent of his business.

Being able to buy cigarettes, Orcutt said, "is a personal freedom. We're cutting into it" with the proposed law.

"No one under 21 is supposed to be in a bar," Orcutt said. If a minor is in the bar, he said, "the owner has a problem."

Ron Shaffer, of Santa Cruz Vending, said if vending machines are banned, cigarette sales should also be banned at convenience stores because youths can often buy cigarettes at the stores.