

# More vandalism at plants may hamper negotiations

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Incidents of smashed car windows, rock-throwing and violations of the court order on the picket lines at Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co. have been on the upswing since last Thursday, and company officials say that could put a damper on negotiations aimed at settling the 3-month-old strike by their union workers.

The upsurge comes after a period of relative calm on picket lines following an agreement between union and company officials several weeks ago to resume talks with a new federal mediator. The company had accused the original mediator of bias.

"After those meetings, the violence almost came to a standstill, even the rock-throwing," said Watsonville Canning President Smiley Verduzco yesterday. "Now it's slowly creeping back up. There have been 20 police reports filed since last Thursday."

The calm on the picket lines prevailed while the two sides were talking in regularly scheduled sessions with the federal mediator.

The other struck company, Richard A. Shaw Inc., has a meeting set for tomorrow with the union, and both sides say some progress is being made.

But talks between Watsonville Canning and the union have been on hold since both sides agreed two weeks ago to have a market study of the frozen-food industry made.

Progress on the market study may not be seen until next year, since lawyers for the two sides have not yet even selected a consulting firm to conduct the study.

Police Chief Ray Belgard confirmed that the vandalism is on the upswing. He said yesterday that police may begin making arrests for even minor infractions of the court order that limits picket activity at the plants.

"The incidents have really picked up," Belgard said. "We don't need to get into that mode again."

Police were to discuss the problem with union officials today, Belgard said. If that doesn't work, he said pickets will be arrested for any violation of the court order. Police have been issuing citations, and not making arrests until a second violation occurred.

Union officials admit the vandalism has increased, but say the culprits are the non-striking workers inside the plants.

"It's escalating from inside the plants," said Leon Ellis, a Teamsters union business agent. "We have fewer and fewer pickets all the time, and the scabs are getting braver and braver. They're the ones who are throwing the first rocks."

Meanwhile, vandalism at Shaw's has not occurred as frequently as at Watsonville Canning, according to police reports.

The vandals "periodically strike, but there haven't been any patterns," said Steve Shaw, the company's vice president.

Verduzco, of Watsonville Canning, said the increase at his plant could hamper negotiations for a settlement.

"As the violence continues, it does inhibit the negotiation process," he said.

The company is required by law to continue negotiations, but Verduzco said his company won't be bullied by the vandals.

"The whole issue of violence, in my opinion, was used by the union to force the company to come to the negotiations (so the union could) get something from us that we don't have," he said. "That's not going to happen."

"We've calmed down virtually all of the violence from the outside," the union's Ellis said, reiterating his charge that most of the violence is being instigated by non-striking workers inside the plants.