

EQ-1989-Watsonville



Mike McCollum

Families camped out at Callaghan Park were busy cooking and eating breakfast this morning.

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Impasse at 'Camp Callaghan'

Officials can't persuade people to move

By CHELA ZABIN
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Most people who spent the first few days after the quake camping in parks, in their cars, or outside their homes, have been persuaded by city officials and emergency workers to find housing elsewhere or go to the official shelters. But about 100 people remain at an unofficial tent city at Callaghan Park, apparently determined not to leave.

The situation worries city officials, who, citing health and fire hazards, would like people to go to the official shelters or move their tents to Ramsay Park. The city has said it will not forcibly move anyone, but has sent workers to talk with the campers, held a press conference, and made announcements over a loudspeaker. Red Cross workers have come out to warn people about health hazards. But few people have left.

"People want to be near their homes," said Dennis

Zumaran, who has been helping out at the camp for about five days.

It's more than that, said Enrique Alvarado, who, with a worker from Salud Para La Gente, went to the camp the day after the earthquake to help it get organized. Alvarado said many of the campers don't want to go to the official shelters because they are "scared to death" of the uniformed National Guardsmen.

One woman, who wouldn't give her name, said she didn't want to go to Ramsay Park because it felt "too military" there, and she didn't want to have to deal with the bureaucracy.

The idea of people running their own camp sounds good, but things have not run smoothly there. People from the neighborhood who needed items came and took them at the expense of people in tents who needed them more, Alvarado said. Leadership, which initially came from the ranks of

the people camping there, has changed several times, and is now in the hands of people "who don't know what's going on," Alvarado said.

And Alvarado and Zumaran have different ideas about what's needed and what the sentiment is at the camp.

Alvarado said that even though the city has been telling people not to donate any more food or clothing, people in Callaghan Park are still in need of food and sleeping bags.

But Zumaran said there were enough supplies and that donations should be sent to Watsonville's Relief Fund.

Zumaran said children are getting sick at the camp and that getting people into authorized shelters was important. One of the places being discussed is the Buena Vista labor camp, which will soon be closed for the winter.

Zumaran thinks the Callaghan campers will welcome living there. Alvarado said

when they heard the proposal they booed.

Alvarado said that the people who have come to persuade campers to leave for Ramsay Park have not been entirely honest about the differences between the two camps. People have been led to believe they will get "all the federal help they need" and new, free apartments if they come to Ramsay Park, he said.

"The city is doing all that they can, and we appreciate that," said Zumaran.

Alvarado said there's a feeling at the camp that the city just wants the displaced people to be out of sight and a fear that once they are, they will be forgotten.

Staying in the park, Alvarado said, is one way of "pushing the city to do something" about getting people back into permanent housing.

"People here want to make a statement," he said.