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SPCA wants spaying, neutering mandatory

The Santa Cruz SPCA expects to hear lots of opposition at a hearing tonight on its proposal to make spaying and neutering of pet cats and dogs mandatory in Santa Cruz County.

The informal hearing will run from 7 to 9 p.m. at Green Acres School, Unit 4, 966 Bostwick Lane in Live Oak.

The SPCA is drafting an ordinance to submit to the county Board of Supervisors that would impose fines on people who failed to spay or neuter their pets by the time the pets are 6 months old.

The law is proposed for the unincorporated areas of the county, not the cities.

It excepts from the ordinance all "dogs and cats who are recognized members of a specific breed and who are intended to be used for breeding or show purposes, or who are purpose-bred as working or service dogs."

Judy Cassada, the Santa Cruz SPCA's director of education, said that exception was "a major concession" made in hope of gaining the support of local pet breeders. A similar proposal in San Mateo County was vehemently opposed by professional pet breeders.

Dogs or cats with a medical condition making them incapable of breeding or of undergoing sterilization surgery would also be exempted. A veterinarian's certification would be required.

Proposed fines are \$100 for the first offense; \$200 for the second; \$300 for the third; and \$500 for each offense after that.

The reason the SPCA is propos-

ing the ordinance is that it is tired of killing animals, Cassada said.

The Santa Cruz SPCA had to "put down" 5,135 dogs and cats last year. That figure represents a decrease from 5,632 in 1989 and 6,370 in 1988, she said, but the numbers are decreasing too slowly.

The job of pet population control is important, Cassada said, but difficult.

"It takes its emotional toll," she said.

SPCA chapters don't want to do it anymore, she said, but they don't have any choice other than prevention.

Besides professional pet breeders, Cassada said, others might object for the same reasons they don't voluntarily spay or neuter their pets now — lack of time or money, or belief in myths about destroying the "lifeforce" of a pet.

Some people just think their pets are really cute, Cassada said, and want to perpetuate that cuteness, even though there are other cute pets at the SPCA shelter. Some people think pets must have "just one litter," and those "one litters" add immensely to the problem, she said.

The SPCA isn't worried about ordinances like this one working too well so that there aren't enough pets to go around.

"We're so far from that," Cassada said. "Twenty years ago, (when many voluntary prevention programs started,) 25 million pets a year were put to sleep, and today, it's still 15 million a year."