

# Business girds for life under graffiti laws

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Watsonville businesses are preparing to comply with a city ordinance that restricts the sale of spray paint and large-tip markers, but some express doubt the ordinance will make a marked difference in the never-ending war on graffiti.

On May 10, the Watsonville City Council adopted two ordinances aimed at curbing graffiti in the city.

The first makes the city responsible for removing graffiti from property at no charge to the property owners, provided the owners notify the city within seven days of discovering the graffiti.

The second ordinance requires merchants to place spray paint and permanent markers with tips

## Some merchants believe the ordinance will not only prove ineffective, but will place a financial burden on their operating budgets.

more than 3/8-inches wide in a secured area, such as a locked display case.

Both ordinances go into effect 30 days from the May 10 adoption date.

Some merchants accept the ordinance affecting the sale of "graffiti tools" as just another law they have to comply with.

Others, however, are not so passive. They believe the ordinance will not only prove ineffective, it

will place a burden on their budgets while the wave of graffiti will continue to sweep the city.

Merchants point to an almost identical law adopted last year by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors and the San Jose City Council. That law, they said, has had no observable effort on the spread of graffiti in the South Bay Area. They predict the same fate for Watsonville.

Kmart manager Vincent Padula

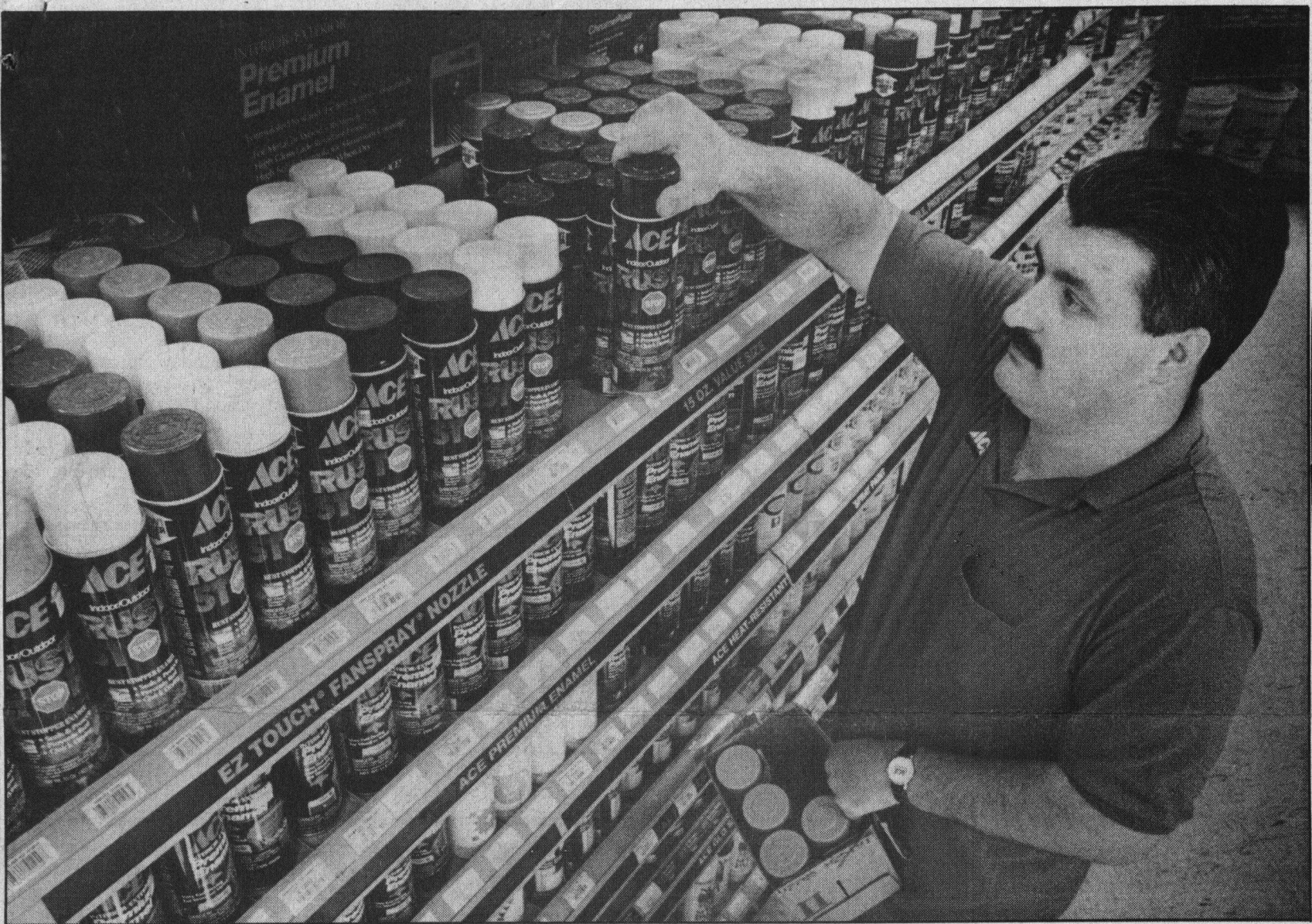
spoke out against the ordinance when it was being considered by the City Council. He said he knows the city had little choice but to adopt the graffiti ordinances, but he believes they will not make a dent in the problem. If minors, for example, want to get cans of spray paint, they will find a way.

"It's like alcohol," Padula said. "If (minors) want to drink, they are going to get someone to buy it for them."

State law prohibits the sale of spray paint to minors.

Padula said he has ordered 10 display cases to store spray paint and other graffiti-related materials. Each case will cost the store between \$500 and \$600. The cases will be under lock and key, and customers will have to ring a bell

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Mike McCollum

Manuel Rodrigues stocked spray paint at his Ace Hardware on Main Street yesterday in preparation for the city's new anti-graffiti ordinance.

## GRAFFITI

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to have a clerk open them. It is not only an inconvenience, he said, it will also affect the bottom line.

"The consumer is the ultimate loser in this deal," Padula said.

All merchants agree graffiti is a blight on the community, but some believe it is not fair for government to saddle business with the task of trying to solve society's problems.

Manuel Rodrigues, owner of two Ace Hardware stores in Watsonville, said it's hard enough trying to deal with the day-to-day affairs of running a store without being enlisted to fight social problems. He said he will store his spray paint in display cases at both his

stores. Those cases will cost him about \$12,000, he said.

In the past, Rodrigues has donated paint and other materials to area groups doing graffiti cleanup. But with the added cost of buying the display cases, he is not sure he will be able to afford to give away those materials anymore.

At Longs Drugs, the ordinance will not apply, because the store stopped selling spray paint about a year and a half ago. The store may also get rid of large permanent markers and sell only markers with washable ink.

On the short block of Marylin Street between Mariposa Avenue and Arthur Road, the graffiti jumps out at the senses from the fences on both sides of the street, a favorite spot for taggers. Scrib-

bling from past attacks can still be made out through paint-over jobs, as newer, fresher tagging adds another layer. It is this type of unsightly mess the city hopes to get rid of with its graffiti-removal ordinance.

Under this ordinance, property owners are to notify the city within seven days after being hit by graffiti. The city would then take care of the problem at no cost to the owners. If the property owner does not notify the city within the allocated time, however, the city can declare the property a public nuisance, clean up the graffiti and bill the owner for the service. The program is expected to cost the city about \$32,000 a year.

The ordinance includes a provision that would require convicted

graffiti offenders to make restitution to the victim. The parents of convicted minors will have to make the restitution. It also contains prevention programs and education for at-risk youth.

Efran Lopez, who lives at Marylin Street and Mariposa Avenue, supports the ordinance, saying it would improve not only the appearance of his home, but his whole neighborhood. His long, tall, white fence makes an irresistible canvas for vandals and has been hit numerous times, despite whitewashing several times.

"Graffiti looks ugly, especially in a nice and calm neighborhood like this," Lopez said. "It gives the neighborhood a bad image."

"It's not art," he added. "If it were a mural, I could appreciate it."