

CHP gives fair warning to Highway 1 speeders

Radar patrols begin immediately; crackdown starts March 21



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Highway 1 motorists have an unusually easy commute near the Morrissey Boulevard overpass Tuesday.

Highways
✓ By **MARINA MALIKOFF**
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SANTA CRUZ — A radar crackdown that has caught thousands of drivers zipping along Highway 17 has now reached the coast, authorities said Tuesday.

The California Highway Patrol will begin special radar patrols to track speeders on Highway 1 effective immediately, agency spokesman Blake Schnabel said.

The program, approved by the CHP commissioner earlier this month, will stretch from the Fishhook — the interchange with Highway 17 — south to the Pajaro River Bridge.

"The speed limit is already 65 and I see speeders all the time," said Patrizia D'Antona, a San Jose resident who drives Highway 1 to visit friends in Aptos. "The highway is too dangerous, so I am in favor of the radar."

While the program officially started Monday, enforcement will be low-key for 30 days to allow drivers to adjust to the increased presence, Schn-

abel said. Signs announcing the radar enforcement will be posted.

"Unless it is excessive speed or reckless driving, you're probably going to get a verbal warning at first," Schnabel said.

But on March 21, out come the ticket books.

The department's 20 patrol cars and five motorcycles stationed locally already are equipped with built-in radar that can be used while an officer's vehicle is in motion or parked. Typically, an officer who suspects a driver is speeding will use radar for confirmation.

"You probably aren't going to see the officers running radar during commute hours when traffic is dead," Schnabel said. "But during the late evening hours and weekends, you will definitely notice a difference in the officers using radar on the side."

Last year, officers issued approximately 500 tickets for excessive speed on the local stretch of Highway 1. Schnabel expects the number of speeding citations and drunken-driving arrests

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to skyrocket, as they have on Highway 17 since the department started a similar safety program there in 1998.

An average of 4,000 speeders are cited on Highway 17 from the Fishhook to the Summit each year with the aid of radar, Schnabel said.

That in turn has made the highway safer. Since 1988, injury collisions have declined 34 percent, and collisions overall are down 32 percent, Schnabel said.

The rate of drunken-driving arrests on Highway 17 also has increased. Between October and December of last year, officers arrested 29 drivers suspected of being under the influence of alcohol.

"Many of those arrests came from using radar," he said. "The person gets pulled over for speeding and then the officer notices signs of intoxication."

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