

# Activists take aim at realistic toy guns

By JENNIFER KOSS

STAFF WRITER

With the Christmas shopping season looming, local members of a War Toys Committee are gearing up to do battle against weapon-like playthings.

Committee member Margaret Reynolds has sent letters to the county Board of Supervisors and to city councils requesting ordinances against toy weapons that look too realistic.

Such toys are more dangerous than the toy weapons of the past, Reynolds said, because they're more detailed now and are more likely to be mistaken for the real thing.

Toy guns were used in a Watsonville robbery and in eight San Jose robberies in the past year, Reynolds said in her letters, and a boy armed with a Lazer Tag weapon was killed

last spring by a San Bernardino police officer who thought the youth was carrying a real gun.

Capitola Police Chief Don Braunton said he did not know of an actual incident in Capitola in which a toy gun masqueraded as a real one, but that it had probably happened.

"I would be very surprised if it hadn't happened," he said. "We get calls every week about people brandishing weapons. And whether they're real or fake, we don't know unless we catch up with them."

He agreed with Reynolds that toy guns are much more detailed these days and look more like the real thing.

They also do more; Braunton said his 16-year-old son bought a battery-operated squirt gun that looks like a carbine rifle and can shoot a stream of water 75 feet.

"Toys are getting so sophisticated," he said, "that I think it's really taking a dangerous direction."

The Santa Cruz City Council was scheduled to consider Reynold's request for an ordinance against the toys this afternoon.

"If enough cities pass the ordinance," Reynolds said, "it will stop the manufacturers from making toys that look so much like the real thing."

Reynolds' letter is included under communications in the Capitola City Council's agenda packet for Thursday night, and is listed as an information item for tonight's Watsonville City Council meeting.

Reynolds also said she received a letter from Supervisor Robley Levy informing her the letter had been distributed to supervisors.

She would not be so up in arms,

Reynolds said, if war toys were more easily distinguished from real weapons. TV shows focusing on war toys and war characters have increased

---

'Toys are getting so sophisticated, that I think it's really taking a dangerous direction.'

— Don Braunton  
Capitola police chief

---

their popularity by targeting young children.

As a grandmother, Reynolds said she resents that.

"It's calculated to hit this market

of little children who are helpless, almost," she said.

She added, "Toward the end of the Vietnam War, there were almost no war toys being sold in this country."

Now GI Joe and He-Man are among the most popular toys on the market and Lazer Tag is promoted on a show that Reynolds called "a half-hour commercial."

She said members of the War Toys Committee plan to leaflet Christmas shoppers with material opposing the toys. The committee has been active about three years.

The committee also sent letters to more than 100 day-care centers and preschools throughout the county, asking teachers to sign a statement that they would not allow war toys in their schools.

Reynolds said 30 letters were signed and returned.