

# Homeless sleepers told to take hike

## State National Guard double-books armory

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**SANTA CRUZ** — Get back on the bus and leave.

That's what a busload of homeless people was told at 6 p.m. Saturday upon arrival at the National Guard Armory, which doubles as a homeless shelter in the winter, where they hoped to bed down for the night.

With no warning, 45 bus riders, plus 35 other homeless people waiting to board a second bus, were shut out of the Armory's emergency housing program.

The first group was bused back to the Homeless Services Center because another organization was renting the armory until 9 p.m. By the time the armory was vacated that night, there were no more shuttle buses running between the services center and the armory.

The mistake drew condemnation from Ken Cole, executive director of the Homeless Services Center, located in the Harvey West industrial area.

"It's an extremely disappointing mistake, and a major disruption for homeless men and women that night," Cole said. "They rented it to someone, on top of our contract. All we could do was open our facilities down here and make sure no one was out on the street because of it."

Cole said this is the first time this sort of problem has ever occurred, though homeless people are sometimes shut out of the armory when a sewage pump fails.

On Monday, the National Guard adminis-



**KENNEDY**  
Says armory contract has problems

# Homeless

Continued from Page A1

tration admitted it goofed.

"I'm doing an inquiry to find out why we had the breakdown," said Sgt. Major Larry Ellsworth of the California National Guard's Sacramento headquarters. "I have a lot of unanswered questions; someone made an assumption that the (renters) would be out by 4 p.m."

Other groups can rent the armory during the winter to early spring, when it is leased as an emergency homeless shelter. But Ellsworth said rentals are day-use only and not supposed to stretch past 4:30 p.m., because homeless people start arriving around 6 p.m.

One of them was Joe Hollis, 58, who was tired when he arrived at the armory. He had no idea he was in for a sleepless night.

"They told us to go," said Hollis, who works at the St. Vincent De Paul Thrift Store in Capitola. "Nobody called us or gave us any warning."

Hollis said he was told a law enforcement group rented the facility that day but neither the Homeless Services Center, an armory staffer nor a National Guard sergeant major could verify this.

After getting bused back to the Homeless Services Center, the clients were allowed to sleep there in a dining room and an area that includes showers and washing machines.

Sleepers had to make do with roughly half the space as the cavernous armory.

"There were 80 people in three rooms," Hollis said. "People were right on top of each other. It was horrible. Nobody got any sleep, and I had to go to work the next day."

On the bright side, the homeless services center has six bathrooms. That's two more bathrooms than the armory, which can house up to 100 people.

Mayor Scott Kennedy said the incident underscores the city's problematic contract with the armory, which costs \$48,000, in state and federal homeless program funds, to rent from late winter to early spring.

"Why should local governments be spending scarce homeless funds paying rent to the National Guard on a building that is built by the public?" he said. "I'd rather we spent the money on a (year-round shelter) than a facility they can kick us out of at any moment."

Cole agreed the rental arrangement was "absurd." He said the scheduling overlap forced the services center to violate its conditional use permit, which forbids the agency from letting people sleep at the services center.

"But we had no other alternative. We could get in trouble, but where were we going to take them? City Hall?"

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