

NCF YOU TIT RP 11/13/87

Capitola stays neutral in war against toy guns

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Capitola won't go to war against toy guns that look real.

The Capitola City Council decided last night to see if the state fights that battle instead, since an escalation appears imminent.

The toy-gun debate was triggered by Margaret Reynolds, member of a War Toys Committee associated with the resource Center for Nonviolence, through letters addressed

to Santa Cruz County's city councils and Board of Supervisors.

The state has already passed a law against brandishing toy guns since she wrote the letters, Reynolds told the Capitola City Council last night.

And Capitola Police Chief Don Branton said he thought more state legislation against the toys would come sometime within the next year.

"Apparently a trend is starting and there will be state

legislation which will make anything local moot," he said.

Still, Reynolds urged the council to follow Santa Cruz' lead in considering a local ban on the guns because many shoppers patronize 41st Avenue stores.

"I don't think it would do any good for Santa Cruz to do it if Capitola doesn't," she said, "because there are far more toy guns sold in Capitola."

Councilman Ron Graves said

he would seriously consider the idea of an ordinance if the recommendation came from Branton, but he has reservations.

"I don't believe I sit as judge and jury to say what would be appropriate for an individual's child," he said.

Graves also said he did not believe it was the toy guns in themselves that were violent, anyway; the toy he remembers most fondly from his childhood was a gun.

"It was a machine gun," he said. "I know that sounds horrible. It was huge, it was blue, and I can remember it was so big my parents couldn't wrap it to put it under the Christmas tree."

Reynolds said she would like to stop the manufacture of toy guns, because she believes there's a correlation between the toys and crime, and sales of the toys have increased 600 percent in the past three years.

Branton said, "I've been in law-enforcement 25 years and people have been using toy guns in stickups for all that time."

"If an ordinance was passed," Mayor Bob Bucher said, "who's to make the determination of what would be a real-looking gun?"

Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan opted for an ordinance as a way to make a statement, but Councilman Jerry Clarke advocated waiting to see what the state would do.