

# Graffiti

Crime & Criminals

## laws are

## on way

### Watsonville merchants see writing on wall

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Special to the Mercury News

Watsonville merchants may not like a new graffiti ordinance that makes it illegal to sell spray paint and markers to minors, but most are taking steps to comply with it.

"I think we're attacking the problem wrong, but we're attacking the only obvious target," said Vincent Padula, general manager of the Watsonville K mart. "Control of sale is a lot easier than control of the child."

The Watsonville City Council unanimously approved revised versions of two graffiti ordinances Tuesday night. The measures impose a seven-day cleanup deadline for property owners who are hit by taggers and prohibit the sale of graffiti materials to minors.

#### Final reading May 10

The final reading of the ordinances is scheduled for May 10, and they will take effect 30 days later. Between now and then, businesses will be ordering locked display cabinets and property owners will be setting aside cans of paint to erase graffiti as soon as it appears.

Padula said K mart will have to buy several large glass cases that could cost \$1,000 each for the spray paint inventory.

"The long-term expense will be the consistent follow-up of having someone available to show legitimate customers these products," he said.

It may be an inconvenience to customers, but it will not result in a direct price increase for paint and markers, he said.

K mart clerks will also be responsible for checking identification to verify customers' ages, just as they already do for cigarettes, glue and spray paint. "Anyone who does not look anywhere near old enough is not allowed to buy it," Padula said.

#### Safely out of reach

At Taylor's Office Supply on Main Street, the big markers are already safely out of reach. "The last couple of years, we've kept the real popular markers used by taggers behind the counter," said owner Scott Taylor. "If we don't have them, they don't bother us."

Taylor thinks the new graffiti ordinances will help generate more community pressure against taggers. "It's a problem in Watsonville," he said. "People are leery of coming into a downtown that's all marked up."

Some of the residents who spoke at Tuesday's public hearing on the ordinances said harsher punishment would better prevent graffiti.