

All is quiet on strike lines

By DONALD MILLER
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WATSONVILLE — Activity along picket lines in the long-simmering frozen-food processing strike remained tepid over the New Year's holiday.

And, after what had seemed to be an escalation in strike-related violence a few weeks ago, that relatively cool atmosphere seems to have settled in like the recent pattern of recurring fog.

According to Watsonville Police Chief Ray Belgard, the holiday passed uneventfully on the picket lines — except for a few incidents of tire slashing directed toward workers at Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co. and Richard Shaw Inc., the two struck companies in the dispute.

Monday, however, a Watsonville Canning employee, Ruben Roman, reported to police he had received a telephoned bomb threat. The caller had threatened to bomb Roman's home and food-catering business, Roman said.

Dec. 20, two firebombs were tossed at Watsonville homes, one of them the home of Watsonville Canning plant manager Fernando Ramirez. No arrests have been made in connection with the firebombings.

Belgard said his department is working on several leads in that case but the apparent shifting of violence away from picket lines and on to the city's residential streets bothers him. He promised his department will take a "hard stand" in seeking perpetrators of such acts.

Otherwise, Belgard said, violence has mostly stilled along the picket lines and the flareups that had occurred in the weeks before Christmas have not been repeated. And, he added, "it might make a difference" now that Teamsters Union Local 912's elections are over.

The election of Joe Fahey — a member of Teamsters for a Democratic Union, a Teamsters' splinter group that has urged a more militant union stance during the strike — to be the local's business agent, does not concern Belgard. He said although he has frequently disagreed with Fahey, "I don't anticipate any problems."

Meanwhile, federally mediated strike talks are still on hold, awaiting the Monday return from vacation of mediator Robert Crall.