

✓ DRUGS

Police nab 50 in drug sweep

SSM
9-13-9
1B

By Lee Quarnstrom
Mercury News Staff Writer

Trying to eliminate narcotics sales in what the district attorney branded the "drug-infested" Beach Flats area of Santa Cruz, police arrested 50 people in a sweep through that and other neighborhoods Thursday.

Officers said they hoped the sweep would have a major impact on the epidemic of illegal drug sales in Beach Flats — described by District Attorney Art Danner as "the last area in Santa Cruz County where you can actually see drug deals going on on street corners."

Most of those arrested — described by Deputy Police Chief Steve Belcher as low- and mid-level street dealers — were charged with felonies, including cocaine sales, possession of cocaine for sale and being convicted felons in possession of firearms.

Danner said 11 of the arrests were on indictments issued by the

The Beach Flats raids followed a four-month probe.

county grand jury last Friday. Another nine people who were indicted remain to be picked up, he said.

Ron Brooks, director of the County Narcotics Enforcement Team, said the sweep followed a four-month investigation that included many purchases of cocaine by undercover agents.

He said Thursday's sweep involved 70 police officers from Santa Cruz County agencies and nearby departments. It began with a briefing at the Santa Cruz police station at 6 a.m. and continued through the morning.

Brooks said agents confiscated \$5,000 in cash, 5 ounces of cocaine valued at more than \$16,000, and an ounce and a half of heroin with a street value of \$8,000.

Not all 50 arrests were in the Beach Flats neighborhood. Several people were arrested at four Live Oak dwellings as well as in the Emeline Street area, investigators said.

Although Brooks hesitated to describe the 50 as members of a "ring," he said there were indications the dealers and their sources of supply were at least loosely organized.

"We feel there is a strong connection between most of them," he said.

He added that bigger dealers "tend to insulate themselves from street dealers."

Belcher said he hoped the arrests, plus follow-up work by a special police unit assigned to patrol Beach Flats, would substantially reduce drug sales in the neighborhood.