

# Throwing in the towel



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Andy Reed of Mission Uniform and Linen plans to go with his job when the firm moves its main operations to Salinas

## Business-M Linen firm plans layoffs; blasts city

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SANTA CRUZ — After being put through the ringer by the city's planning regulations, Mission Uniform and Linen Service says it is throwing in the towel on plans to expand its Swift Street plant.

The company will continue to serve its 700 local customers as it has for more than 30 years, but will shift its laundry operations to its plant in Salinas, according to Regional Director Claude Turpin.

The move, he said, will result in the loss of 65 jobs with a weekly payroll of \$20,000.

The Swift Street plant will remain open as a sales office and warehouse for linen and uniforms to serve the local area. Turpin said the plant will be staffed by eight people.

A city planner later said the regulations are part of the city's building code. The planner also said that the city has found the best time to get structures up to current codes is when major additions are planned.

The company went to the city Planning Department last August with plans for a \$360,000 expansion of the plant. When the city got finished tacking on conditions to the project some four months later, the cost had

risen more than \$50,000, according to Turpin. Those conditions included screening equipment that had been at the plant for 25 years and tearing up cement to plant trees.

By then, the parent company, Mission Industries of Santa Barbara, had had enough, Turpin said, and decided to do the expansion in Salinas instead.

Part of the expansion here was to house a new water-treatment system to meet the city's high standards, Turpin said.

Ironically that new system was necessitated by the company's voluntary reduction in water use because

of the drought. The reduction of water use, Turpin said, caused the concentrations of grease and oil to rise.

Since that new system had to be housed, the company decided to go ahead with a \$225,000 expansion of its warehouse, too.

Because the value of the project exceeded \$5,000, a host of design regulations came into play. Most of the requirements were adopted by the city in the 25 years since the Swift Street plant was built. The company previously had a plant at Water Street and Morrissey Boulevard.

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Turpin said he was told the plant's restrooms had to be made accessible to wheelchairs, even though the nature of the plant's operation made hiring employees in chairs impractical.

Landscaping had to be beefed up. Turpin said he was first told he would need to plant more shrubs. Then, he said, he was told cement on one side of the building would have to be torn up and trees planted.

Rooftop machinery, which had been exposed to public view for 25 years, would have to be screened, Turpin was told. That, alone, would have cost the company

\$12,000.

A new kind of gate would have to be installed.

As the costs mounted, the company decided expanding in Santa Cruz "would not be a good business investment," Turpin said.

"We are committed to Santa Cruz. We've been here for many years. This was a choice we did not want to have to make," said Marketing Director Jack Kotowski.

City Planner Ken Thomas said Tuesday that all of the conditions imposed were basic.

"It was not a case that staff was way out in left field coming up with things on its own. We're bound by the (city building) code as to what findings must be made

before we can grant a permit," he said. The city, he said, has determined that major additions to buildings offer a good time for the entire site to be upgraded to current codes.

Thomas said he visited the site and tried to work with Mission Industries in an effort to satisfy the new requirements.

Turpin takes a different view. He said he found the city to be inflexible. "They don't seem to have any leeway in making decisions," he said.

Thomas said the company could have appealed the conditions. For just \$25 more, he said, Mission Industries could have pleaded its case before the Zoning Board.