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La Selva^{1B}
arrests
called
anti-gay

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Members of Santa Cruz County's gay legal community have lashed out at authorities over ongoing arrests of men at Vista Point on Highway 1 — branding the police sweeps as "anti-gay discrimination."

Sixteen people have been arrested at the La Selva Beach area rest stop for alleged sex offenses in two weekend crackdowns by the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department.

On Sunday, seven men and a woman were arrested during a sting operation. Eight men were taken into custody in the same location the weekend before, Jim Ross, a sheriff's spokesman said.

Advances alleged

Most were arrested on misdemeanor sex charges after they allegedly approached undercover officers and made sexual advances.

In a statement by the Gay and Lesbian Legal Association of Santa Cruz County, representatives called the operation — using plainclothes officers posing as gay men — a case of entrapment, targeting gay males for harassment.

Said attorney Nancy de la Pena:

"If this were a heterosexual lovers' lane, like Lighthouse Point, I doubt the police would have taken this action. They could have taken less intrusive means of dealing with what they perceive as a problem."

Alternatives suggested

De la Pena said posted warnings or uniformed patrols could just as easily be employed with the same effect. The idea that the publicized sweeps are "sending a message" to the community is wrong, too, de la Pena said, because many of those arrested are from outside the area.

Two of the 16 people booked into county jail were a man and woman who had been involved with each other in a sex act, the sheriff's department reported. During the initial sweep, one man was found carrying an AZT pill, which is an anti-AIDS drug. One other admitted having AIDS, according to Ross.

The police action, said Ross, was undertaken in response to growing complaints from people who stopped at the rest area.

"A lot of tourists and sightseers would wander off the paths and get a surprise," said Ross. "We knew that kind of activity went on but never how bad it was until we started going down and doing stings."