

# Citizens chew on dog laws

By MARTHA MENDOZA  
Sentinel staff writer

**SANTA CRUZ** — There was a lot of barking but no biting Thursday when about 50 dog owners and community members met to discuss canine laws in Santa Cruz.

"I'd be the first to acknowledge that there is a problem with poop, but there is an ordinance in effect here, so why not enforce it and fine people if they violate it?" said Donald O'Regan, who noted that he was speaking on behalf of his dog.

In Santa Cruz, dogs are banned from city beaches, along the San Lorenzo River, in the downtown area around Pacific Avenue, near or on the wharf and in San Lorenzo Park. Dogs must be on leashes in other parks and public areas in the city. There are no designated areas where dogs may run free in the city of Santa Cruz.

Owners must pick up after their dogs or face an \$84 fine.

Unfortunately, said Parks and Recreation Department Director Jim Lang, there is not enough funding or staff to enforce the laws.

"We need to change the law so it works and meets the needs of the majority of the people," said Lang.

It was apparent Thursday that those laws are a sensitive subject

*Please see DOGS — A2*

# City leash laws depend on area

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Most California cities have established some type of legal restrictions for dogs, although the levels of enforcement and the specific issues vary widely. Most cities require leashes or voice control, and some have written laws about picking up after pets. Here are examples of the laws in some Northern California cities:

**Santa Cruz** — Dogs are banned from all city beaches, along the San Lorenzo River, in the downtown area around Pacific Avenue, near or on the wharf and in San Lorenzo Park. Dogs must be on leashes in other parks and public areas in the city. There are no designated areas where dogs may run free in the city of Santa Cruz.

One section of the law prohibits owners from letting the pets defecate on public property, and another section says it is an infraction not to pick up after dogs.

**Watsonville** — Dogs must be kept on leashes all the time when they are in public areas, and there is an additional law reiterating the same law for female dogs "in season." People may not have more than three dogs per home. Dog owners are required to clean up after their pets.

**Carmel** — Dogs must be on leashes in the downtown business district, but can be "under voice command" and closer than 25 feet to their owners in residential areas. Dogs are allowed to run loose on beaches and in most parks as long as their owner is present and can call them into control.

Dogs that have attacked people must be muzzled in public and female dogs in heat may not run free anywhere.

People may not have more than four dogs per home.

**Monterey** — Dogs must be on leashes in all public areas of the city. Dogs that are running loose can be impounded by the police or animal safety officers, and owners will be fined. Impounded dogs that are not picked up after three days can be killed. People cannot drive dogs around in cars unless they are safely confined.

Dog owners are required to clean up after the pets, and will be fined up to \$100 for their first offense, \$200 for their second offense and \$500 for their third offense.

**Livermore** — Dogs must be on a leash unless they are hunting wild birds or game, herding, guarding, or doing other domestic work. Dogs also can be off of leashes for obedience training.

Biting dogs will be quarantined and stray dogs will be impounded. Dogs must be on leashes except when they are hunting or in obedience training. Female dogs are not allowed in public when they are in heat "to prevent the attraction of other dogs."

**Walnut Creek** — Dogs must be on leashes or within voice control of their owners when they are in public areas. Dogs may not be left tethered on the street for more than 15 minutes, and female dogs in heat must be kept in places that "prevent unplanned male access."

Owners are required to pick up

## Dog laws

*Continued from Page A1*

to many dog owners in town, as well as to people who have been chased or bitten by someone else's Fido.

Anticipating problems, organizers of the meeting begged for harmony.

"We have to figure out a way we can coexist in a way that is peaceful and safe for everyone," said Elizabeth Schick.

Jillian Greensite, who said she runs and swims daily at the beach, was heckled loudly when she voiced her concerns about the public health dangers of dog droppings.

"I, like everyone else, used to think that dog poop was just unpleasant," she said.

In fact, she said, "a lot of low-grade illnesses we have in children in our community is from dog feces."

Tom Wallace said city officials should consider changing the outright bans on dogs, especially downtown.

"You know Santa Cruz isn't classier than Santa Barbara, and it isn't classier than Los Gatos, and in both of those towns you can walk downtown with dogs on a leash," Wallace said.

Most of the dog owners present agreed that people must be responsible for picking up after their own pooches, and Betsy Jones brought a plastic bag to demonstrate the best technique.

"You can be extremely dexterous with this, especially with practice," she said, slipping her hand inside the bag.

Elton Reed came with his own solution — allow dogs to defecate in coastal ice plants.

"It seems that the combination of salty air and the chemistry of the ice plant very quickly deodorizes the material, and within two or three days, dries and disintegrates it so that it drops down and becomes part of the humus needed by the ice plant to become greener," Reed said.

Lang said the plan wouldn't work because city workers must weed and maintain the plants.

Organizers decided to hold follow-up meetings to begin work on education, enforcement, changing city laws, fines and possibly designating free areas for dogs to run. The next meeting is scheduled for Sept. 24. For more information, call the Parks and Recreation Department at 429-3777.

after their dogs in all public areas except horse trails or animal exercise areas.

**Santa Clara** — Owners must keep dogs on leashes, and must clean up immediately if they defecate or urinate on public property. Dogs are not allowed to defecate or urinate on any private property.

\* Police and rescue dogs, and dogs which assist disabled people, are exempt from these laws.