

✓ Armory will open for homeless

By GREG BEEBE

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SANTA CRUZ — The National Guard Armory is available for use as an emergency homeless shelter, allaying fears that the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf would keep the building closed.

For three winters, the armory has been used as an overflow shelter for the homeless during the winter months as part of Gov. George Deukmejian's Cold Weather Emergency Shelter Program.

When the weather is rainy and below 50 degrees, or temperatures drop below 45 degrees, the armory is opened to the homeless after all other available shelter space is filled.

Fears the "California National Guard would be mobilized for Persian Gulf duty" led to concerns that the armory would be unavailable this winter, said Human Resources Agency Administrator Will Lightbourne on Tuesday.

Late last week, county officials received word that the armory would be available for use as an emergency shelter unless "things suddenly get very weird" in the Persian Gulf, Lightbourne said.

County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello on Monday requested that the board accept the armory item as a late addition to Tuesday's agenda. The county's Human Resources Agency and Office of Emergency Services coordinate use of the armory shelter with the National Guard and the Interfaith Satellite Shelter Project.

The board voted 5-0 to direct Lightbourne to sign the necessary agreements with the National Guard to open the armory for use as a shelter.

Andrew Morin of the Interfaith Satellite Shelter Project said the armory will only be used when the project's 45 to 60 beds in local churches are filled.

Some homeless, Morin said, seemed reluctant to use the armory because of a recent National Guard decision which sought to post armed guards at each California armory shelter.

"They dropped that rule," Morin said.

Meanwhile, use of the Interfaith Project has increased about 25 percent over last year at this time, Morin said. "There's more homeless people; I'm afraid to say that's the case."

Under the Interfaith Project, homeless persons gather near the city public works yard on River Street, where vans pick them up and take them to various participating churches.

"One of the reasons we're getting increased use is that our program is getting more and more accepted. It's a safe program, it certainly is a bare-bones program. There's very little reluctance these

days to get involved in our program," Morin said.

Lightbourne said as many as 40 homeless persons used the armory on a given night last winter, although the building could conceivably hold more.

In another homeless-related move, the board — at the request of Supervisor Fred Keeley — postponed for two weeks a plan to direct Mauriello and a board representative to "coordinate an approach" with the Mayors Select Committee for creating a task force on the homeless.

The task force idea is the byproduct of letters to the board from former Santa Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt and members of social service agencies and a March 1990 report by the Short-Term Housing Coalition of Santa Cruz County which assessed the shelter and housing needs of the county's nearly 2,000 homeless men, women and children.