

Census 1990

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What counts is the uncounted, local officials say

SANTA CRUZ — The mail-out, mail-back format for the 1990 census guarantees an undercount, according to people calling for a door-to-door count.

The earthquake, as well as suspicion of government and unconventional lifestyles make it all the

more difficult to get a complete count of Santa Cruz County residents, a city of Santa Cruz official said.

"The chance for an overcount is nil; the chance for an undercount is pretty much guaranteed," said Larry Pearson, a city planner

working with the Santa Cruz Complete Count Committee.

Santa Cruz and Watsonville have established committees to get out the word and help the census reach under-represented groups. Both cities will fund and staff assistance centers to help residents complete

the census.

An accurate count is critically important to the area, particularly in the aftermath of the Oct. 17 earthquake.

Local communities have criticized the Bureau of the Census for

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not taking into account local needs.

"These guidelines that flow out of Washington don't reflect the sensitivity needed in local communities," said Rep. Leon Panetta, D-Monterey.

Panetta compared the census with FEMA. "They hire these people with very little experience in doing the job."

Local census district manager Franca Gargiulo gets high marks from local officials who at the same time blast bureau policies.

The 1990 census will determine representation in Congress and is the basis for allocating federal funds to agencies that provide services to low-income and disadvantaged persons and the elderly. Programs in education, housing and development receive funding based on census numbers.

"The problem is, you get an

undercount, you live with it for 10 years," Pearson said.

Census forms will be mailed Friday. They are due back April. Census counters will visit homes where forms were sent but not returned.

"It's the people who never get it in the first place," Pearson said. "We've got a real problem in Santa Cruz County."

Among the key problem areas:

- "Phantom dwellings" — illegal units with no address. Pearson estimates there may be 500 to 1,000 in the city. Mailed forms either won't reach residents or residents may fear a building inspector is close behind.

- Persons displaced by the earthquake, living temporarily out of town.

- Homeless, living on the streets or in illegal campgrounds. A special homeless count is planned next Tuesday but some say it won't

go far enough.

- Concern by undocumented immigrants that census answers will be used by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

- General suspicion over government access to the detailed information on census forms.

Census officials stress that all answers are confidential. Aggregate information will be available for a community, but individual answers are secret for 72 years, Gargiulo said.

All census workers are sworn to secrecy. Disclosure is a federal offense punishable by five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine, she said.

INS Commissioner Gene McNary has promised the INS would not conduct neighborhood or factory raids during the census, said Panetta who had pressed McNary to halt enforcement activities while the census is under way.

Local communities have blasted census regulations for making financially strapped cities do their work for it. Santa Cruz set aside \$3,000 to staff its assistance center.

The office is tentatively scheduled to open Monday, March 26 at 212 Locust St., Santa Cruz, where the Federal Emergency Management Agency had its assistance center. It will be open from noon to 8 p.m.

The census has hired hundreds of local residents to work as counters, or innumerators as they are called. More are still needed, particularly in the mountain areas and San Lorenzo Valley, Gargiulo said. Pay is \$7 an hour plus mileage.

A test is scheduled for 10 a.m. today at the Scotts Valley Senior Citizens Centers, 370 Kings Village Road, Scotts Valley, Gargiulo said.