



Officer Jerry Harris with new sign

Kurt Ellison

City crackdown on cruising starts

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STAFF WRITER

Cruising — an activity long associated with teenagers and customized cars — will no longer be allowed in a large section near Watsonville High School.

Police said yesterday they intend to "strictly enforce" a city anti-cruising law which takes effect this week — possibly as soon as today.

The law was adopted last March by the Watsonville City Council and was to be implemented at the start of school this fall. Its implementation was delayed a few weeks because of sign-printing delays.

Pajaro Valley school district officials asked for the ordinance, saying cruising primarily causes traffic problems and noise near the school.

Police Sergeant George Rawson said police worked with the school district to develop the ordinance. Rawson said cruising is connected with fighting, illegal drug use and that cruisers, mostly young men, pester young women at the school.

Tony Calvo, Watsonville High principal, said this morning that cruising cars slow down and congest traffic around the school and noise from the cruisers' stereos disrupt classrooms.

Any cruisers seen driving around the school area will be stopped and told about the ordinance. The second time, they will receive a warning. If they are stopped a third time within three hours of the first stop, they will be fined.

Rawson said both drivers and passengers will have to pay fines and that switching cars and drivers won't help.

Rawson said officers will take a common-sense approach to stopping motorists. He said the average person won't be bothered and indicated only people who look like troublemakers and people who are known troublemakers will be stopped.

Also, he said, school buses, police cars, cabs and emergency vehicles will be exempt from the law.

The law will restrict the travel of motor vehicles along the streets bordering Watsonville High School property and school district offices.

In fact, any person driving past a police post at the school three times within a three-hour period may be subject to a fine or arrest.

Rawson said as soon as "no-cruising" signs can be posted, the law will take effect. He said the signs were delivered recently after delays and are ready to go up today, tomorrow or Thursday.

He said cruisers will be fined \$35 for violating the ordinance the first time and \$50 for a second offense. A third offense is considered a misdemeanor and could lead to arrest. Each time, cruisers will be given two chances to leave before being fined or arrested.

He said the ordinance was developed after a shooting incident near the school about a year ago.

He said there had been "a lot of non-student activity during high school hours — gang violence, rival gangs..." that were connected to cruising.

"Another thing is narcotic activity at the school. During lunch hour students purchase and sell," he said. "Finally, it's a fact that there's generally guys cruising the school to try to 'pick up' girls at lunch hour. The ordinance will make it a safer environment."

Rawson said that 10 signs, with the words "Cruising Prohibited" painted on them, will be placed along streets around the school, including East Beach, Carr, Lincoln, Blackburn and Marchant streets, Maple Avenue and Riverside Drive.

Rawson said he does not anticipate any problems with enforcement because the ordinance clearly spells out how

the problem will be handled.

He said he researched the way other cities handle anti-cruising ordinances. Most cities target the entire downtown area. He said Watsonville's is the only ordinance he knows of that deals exclusively with a school area.

A part-time officer who works at the school will man a control station on the grounds and issue warnings, Rawson said.

Officers will concentrate on stopping cruising around lunch time and immediately after school lets out, at about 3 p.m.

REFERENCE