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Abandoned vehicles target of proposed tax

Scotts Valley to consider county plan

By Terri Morgan
Special to the Mercury News

The Scotts Valley City Council is expected to approve a resolution tonight that will help the city recover the money it spends removing abandoned automobiles.

If it approves the measure, Scotts Valley will join the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz and Watsonville, and the unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County, in establishing a countywide abandoned vehicle abatement program. The program, which is scheduled to begin Jan. 1 and run for the next five years, will cost Santa Cruz County motorists an extra \$1 a year to register their vehicles. The additional money then will be distributed to cities on a per capita basis to help them recover the cost of removing abandoned vehicles from their roadways. Scotts Valley is expected to receive \$6,000 to \$8,000 each year.

"Last year we received 300 calls for (vehicle abatement) services," said Sgt. Bruce Lindsay of the Scotts Valley Police Department. "While that sounds like a stagger-

ing number of calls for a city our size, only 55 of those vehicles were actually towed. The other 245 complaints were resolved."

Lindsay said most calls about abandoned vehicles in Scotts Valley are made by residents complaining about what appears to be a wrecked car parked in front of a neighbor's house, or in their yard. Resolving those complaints actually costs the city more money than just hauling the car away because of the time involved, he said.

If a vehicle is abandoned on a public road, it is ticketed. If the car is not moved, or the owner does not contact the police department within 72 hours to claim it, the automobile will be towed to a wrecking yard, where it is dismantled and crushed.

The company removing abandoned cars from Scotts Valley currently sells those vehicles for scrap metal, so the city is not billed for towing charges. "We expect that

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will change in the next year or so, because the price of scrap metal has dropped so low," Lindsay said.

In the past, Scotts Valley has paid about \$35 for each abandoned car removed, he said. That price is a bargain compared to the expense of locating the registered owner of a disputed vehicle and sending a traffic officer out to talk to the

owner.

"We try to work with people as much as possible," Lindsay said. "There's no sense in alienating people, especially if the car in question has a sentimental value."

Under the abandoned vehicle cost recovery program, Scotts Valley would be reimbursed for the time it takes a traffic officer to resolve each complaint.

Automobiles abandoned on public roads in unincorporated parts

of the county are handled by the California Highway Patrol.

"If we can trace ownership, we send a citation to the last known owner for abandoning a vehicle," said Officer Larry Walton of the CHP's Santa Cruz County office. "Anyone who sells a car that may ultimately end up on the street as abandoned should notify the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles). If they don't, it might come back to haunt them."