

WARS - Gulf War - demon strators.

Town Clock vigil draws protests

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SANTA CRUZ — Demonstrators holding a 24-hour peace vigil at the Town Clock say they will remain until the gulf war ends, but if complaints to city authorities are any indication, a segment of the public believes they have worn out their welcome.

"We've had numerous complaints over the general cleanliness or deterioration from a standard of maintenance due to these people," said Police Chief Jack Bassett.

"They are occupying a public facility in a way it was never intended to be used," said Jim Lang, director of the city's department of parks and recreation, which is responsible for maintaining the Town Clock.

"It was never intended to be a storage site for personal property, written on, or used as a public bathroom," he said.

Demonstrators who were braving the elements Monday night at the Town Clock to call for peace told the Sentinel they were exercising their constitutional rights, trying their best to keep the area tidy and were being subjected to what they termed harassment by authorities.

"They keep changing the ground

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— Jennie Coleman, protester

rules," said Dave Jacobs, who has been cited for littering by police.

"It's a vigil," he said. "Sometimes there are as many as 50 to 60 people here, sometimes there are only five or six. On Saturday night, we had 50 high school kids who stayed until five in the morning, and at seven, a police officer came by to complain it was dirty."

Monday, clothes were seen hanging from the trees around the clock tower. Makeshift signs calling for peace have been erected and stacks of food and other materials have contributed to a cluttered appearance.

Early Saturday, city parks rangers confiscated "about a truckload" of personal belongings, Lang said.

Bassett said the demonstrators' complaints the seizure was conducted by police were incorrect. He

said his officers only stood by to keep the peace because of complaints from city workers that they were being threatened and spat upon.

Jacobs accused authorities of making up the allegations.

Bassett and Lang both said they were not out to deprive the demonstrators of their right to protest the war, but that those who assemble should abide by city laws banning camping, litter and other infractions.

Lang said city officials met Monday to discuss the issue in response to a number of complaints from the public.

"Hopefully we'll get compliance if everyone follows the rules of the game," he said. "We're just concerned the facility is being run down and we can't allow that to take place."

The demonstration, which varies in size from night to night, has been continuing since the U.S. attacked Iraq Jan. 16.

Area high school students like Charles Cunningham, 15, of Santa Cruz and Jennie Coleman, 15 of Soquel, have been active participants.

Cunningham, participating with the blessing of his parents, said he has been ticketed for camping after being warned once.

"The cops keep making us move our stuff," he said. "First they said they wanted everything in back, then they said they wanted it off the tower."

"We're willing to cooperate with them," Coleman said. "But sometimes I feel they don't give us a chance. We try to be respectful of them and they don't seem to be that way with us."

With no immediate end to the war in sight, occupation of the tower is a certainty for some time to come and Lang said authorities would be stepping up their efforts to maintain cleanliness and order.

"There's nothing wrong with being there," he said. "But don't turn it into a private space to use as you see fit."

"It's owned by the public and the public has a right to expect it to be maintained as public property."