

Police issue warning notices to some Occupy Santa Rosa campers

By [MARTIN ESPINOZA](#) & [KEVIN McCALLUM](#)

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Thursday, November 17, 2011 at 12:18 p.m.

Protesters at Santa Rosa City Hall braced for a police raid Thursday evening after officers issued notices warning those camping on the property without permits that they faced eviction and arrest.

Officers began attaching the notices, which were given to everyone at the Occupy site, to tents shortly before noon and it had a chilling effect on the mood of the camp.

Several protesters removed tents voluntarily while others vowed to stay until they were arrested. During the group's afternoon General Assembly meeting, 24-year-old activist Carl Patrick urged those gathered not to lose heart.

"We're not losing. We're not breaking apart. We're changing our tactics. We're changing our direction," Patrick said. "It's a good thing."

The local Occupy demonstration, launched in Santa Rosa on Oct. 15, is similar to now global protests against income inequality. The Santa Rosa protest became a tent city on Oct. 29, when city officials allowed protesters to pitch tents at two City Hall lawns.

Shortly before noon, police officers made their way through the two campsites on the east and west lawns of City Hall property facing First Street. Confused, some of the homeless people who had received permits two days earlier asked why they were getting the "eviction notices."

Police explained that the notices were not formal eviction letters but rather "information" distributed to everyone, warning of what would happen if campers remained without a permit.

The notices, called "Notice of violations and demand to cease violations," read in part: "You do not have permission to lodge overnight at City Hall unless you have a valid camping permit issued by the City. You must remove all tents, sleeping bags, tarps cooking facilities and equipment and any other lodging material from City Hall immediately. Your continued use of City Hall property for overnight lodging will subject you to arrest."

On Tuesday, the city issued permits to 40 people for use at 29 tent sites, even as Occupy Santa Rosa's General Assembly voted to reject the permit process. The group's decision-making body accused the city of changing the terms of the permit process that were negotiated last week.

The group objected to the city limiting the number of tents to 57, a move that would have likely forced the eviction of a number of the nearly 100 tents that were present last week. The group also objected to the requirement that camping permit holders post their permit, which contained names and photographs.

City Manager Kathy Millison said the city worked hard to craft a permit program that was fair and safe, but said health and safety issues at the site had gotten out of

control.

Even before notices were distributed, Occupiers began breaking down larger communal tents and tarps such as the medical tent, the feeding and welcome station and information booths.

While some Occupy activists said they were not going to take down their tents and were willing to risk arrest, others said they were ready to take a different tactic.

"I'll come back if they don't let me camp," said Louis Smith, a 22-year-old Santa Rosa native who said he spent seven months in Iraq two years ago with the Army's 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment.

Smith described himself as a "transient" as he packed up his things while police officers watched over the scene.

"I'm just glad that people are standing up for their rights and finally waking up." he said. "I'll get some warm clothes and doze off on the steps at night."

Nick Baker, the program director of Catholic Charities' Homeless Service Center, walked through the campsite Thursday afternoon, encountering familiar faces, letting people know that they have other options.

"I don't want to take people who are here for political reasons, exercising their First Amendment rights. I want to take people who are homeless and have no place to go," Baker said, adding that he was visiting the site as "a concerned citizen."

The somewhat frantic scene at City Hall Thursday stemmed from a meltdown in what previously had been a mostly cooperative relationship between the city and local occupiers.

Some homeless campers with permits, drawn to the site because it offered them more freedom than shelters, waited for their permitted spots to be unoccupied. In some cases, homeless people camping on the east lawn were given permits for spots on the west lawn that were taken by occupiers.

"I have 19 A and it's not open," Debralyne Gould, a homeless woman who received her permit late Tuesday. "I tore the tent down expecting two days ago to move into the space that's being occupied. So, I've been sleeping under a tarp with two shopping carts for walls."

Jennifer Phillips, assistant city manager, said that people who have permits would be allowed to stay and relocate their tents to the campsite assigned to them.

"And they may stay until Nov. 30," she said. "That's the day that the permits expire."

She said the city has stopped issuing permits. Asked whether the city would renew existing permits beyond Nov. 30, Phillips said that was "undetermined."

"We continue to be concerned about overcrowding, sanitation and health issues," she said. "We're letting people know that if they don't have a permit they need to leave. Leave means to take down their tents."

Phillips said that the city would honor people's right to assemble. She would not say how much time the city was going to give the occupiers to remove their tents before enforcement would begin.

"We're asking them to do it now," she said.

Aware police could descend on the camp at any moment, rumors among protesters swirled Thursday. Some said they had spotted SWAT officers entering the city annex across First Street from the site, but that could not be confirmed and there was no

action.

During the group's afternoon meeting, several people strongly urged those who were planning to get arrested to remain calm and make a statement with their non-violent resistance.

"We need to be disciplined. We need to be completely non-violent," said Newman Strawbridge.

American Civil Liberties Union attorney Steve Fabian advised protesters who planned to get arrested about the variety of consequences they could face if they were found with weapons, or argued or fought with police.

"It's a scary situation for you. It's a scary situation for the police," Fabian said. "If you're going to cooperate, let them know that."

Others suggested people to take video of the arrests and put them on YouTube and other social media to "watch the cops take down a 100 percent peaceful protest."

Copyright © 2011 PressDemocrat.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.