

WATSONVILLE FLUORIDATION

City fluoride project short by \$1 million

Dental group reviewing bids

✓ *fluoridation*
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WATSONVILLE — A decade-old push to fluoridate Watsonville's water came up more than \$1 million short in the bids for construction.

The California Dental Association Foundation must now decide whether to press forward or scrap the project.

"If they don't pay for it, we won't build it," said Steve Palmisano, the city's water division manager. "We don't have that kind of money for unplanned projects."

Nor would there likely be much support for the controversial water treatment aimed at preventing tooth decay. Watsonville voters narrowly approved an initiative banning fluo-

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ridation in 2002, and the City Council defended the initiative in court for years. Only after losing the court battle did the council, on a 4-3 vote, accept a \$1.6 million grant from the dental foundation in September 2010 to build a system.

Danville-based Mountain Cascade offered to build the project for \$2.8 million, the lowest of five bids, according to the city. The high bid, submitted by

Blocka Construction of Fremont, is for \$3.5 million.

The foundation is reviewing the bids, spokeswoman Alicia Malaby said. She could not provide a time line for an answer.

"CDA (California Dental Association) and the CDA Foundation continue to believe in and support community water fluoridation and would like to see the entire state fluoridated in the near future," a written statement from the foundation said.

Fluoridating Watsonville's drinking water was anticipated to be costly because individual buildings and sys-

tems must be constructed at each of the city's 13 wells and its pumping station on Corralitos Creek. But Palmisano said city officials and its consulting engineers were surprised at how expensive the bids were, especially in the current economic climate that's left some contractors with too little work.

Palmisano said the dental foundation approved the design documents and requirements before the bidding package went out. He said there's no way to shave expenses further, and the fact that the bids came in fairly close indicates an accurate reflection of the project's cost.

California law requires cities of 10,000 or more people to fluoridate if an outside entity provides the funding.

According to the foundation, 23 million Californians, nearly 63 percent, receive fluoridated water through their taps. Watsonville would be the first in Santa Cruz County to fluoridate.

Most dental professionals and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention vouch for its safety and effectiveness.

Opponents express concerns nevertheless and say they shouldn't be forced to ingest the chemical against their will.