

WATSONVILLE WATER SUPPLY

State cites city for failing to fluoridate

State health officials set
deadline for adding chemical

~~Fluoridation~~
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WATSONVILLE — The state Department of Public Health cited Watsonville on Thursday for failing to fluoridate its water supply.

The citation comes seven months after the City Council put off signing a contract for a \$2 million grant to pay for a fluoridation system and established a committee to continue negotiating the deal.

"I was disappointed to see that (citation),

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and frankly a little bit surprised," said Councilwoman Kimberly Petersen, who sits on the committee. "(Public health officials) had been involved in a couple of the meetings and I thought they saw we were negotiating in good faith."

The committee was expected to bring the contract back to the council in March or April, but Petersen said complications with her pregnancy and then the city budget process delayed its work. She couldn't say when negotiations might be wrapped up.

The citation sets an Aug. 29 deadline for the city to provide written assurance

that it plans to comply with a 2003 state order to fluoridate and calls for submission of a schedule for implementation by Sept. 19.

City Attorney Al Smith said he would discuss the citation with the City Council in closed session Tuesday.

It's unclear what, if any, penalties might be imposed if the city fails to comply with the latest order.

Fines of \$200 to \$1,000 a day are described in the citation for failure to comply, but a penalty was not levied with the citation.

The citation letter was penned by Jan Sweigert, district engineer at the Drinking Water Field Operations Branch of the state public health department in Monterey.

Sweigert declined to comment, referring questions to Sacramento head-

quarters. A spokesman there couldn't immediately comment, and said Friday's furlough of state employees would delay a response.

Local and state health advocates have been pushing fluoridation as a way to reduce tooth decay among Watsonville's low-income population.

But foes question the safety and effectiveness of the practice.

Watsonville voters rejected fluoridation by a slim majority in 2002, and the city fought the state order in court for several years. Since 2006, it's been negotiating with the California Dental Association Foundation over the grant contract.

Under state law, cities with a population of 10,000 or more are required to fluoridate if an outside entity is willing to cover the cost.