



BARRY GUTIERREZ — MERCURY NEWS

# Strong fluoride views but light turnout

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While most voters leaving Santa Cruz polling places Tuesday proudly sported little stickers announcing "I voted," Andrew Wedel, 35, exited the city Museum of Natural History without having marked a ballot.

Wedel, a microbiologist at the University of California-Santa Cruz, was at the Seabright-area polling place with his pal Adam Sherman, who had just voted Yes on Measure N, meaning a vote against fluoridating city water supplies.

"This may not be the most important issue in the world, but it's certainly interesting. Each side is so virulently opposed to the other that the arguments

have been really something," said Sherman, 26, a graduate student in linguistics. "There are medical professionals on either side of the fluoridation issue.

Early voter turnout was light Tuesday morning at two Eastside polling places

where voters were interviewed. Opinions on the controversial ballot measure to ban water fluoridation in Santa Cruz seemed mixed among voters casting ballots, many of whom admitted it had been a some-

times confusing issue.

Sherman said he read scientific studies on both sides of the fluoride issue before deciding how to vote.

"I'm opposed to adding fluoride to the

See **FLUORIDE**, Page 4B

**'Each side is so virulently opposed to the other that the arguments have been really something.'**

— Adam Sherman

Curt Stafford, inspector for Santa Cruz County's Precinct 3146, walks around the polling place Tuesday morning at Grace United Methodist Church. By 11:30 a.m., 61 voters had cast ballots on the measure.

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## ■ FLUORIDE

from Page 1B

water supply. If so many are opposed to it, there must be something to it," he said. "I just came to the conclusion that it's not worth taking a risk."

Fluoride, an acknowledged reducer of cavities and considered by most health experts as safe in quantities introduced to public water supplies, is endorsed by the majority of health officials, and was mandated for state water supplies in 1995. But fluoride opponents have focused on a handful of studies showing a possible link to cancer, Alzheimer's disease and bone fractures.

Wedel, who said he'd read those studies, too, said he was "very emotionally conflicted" by the debate over water fluoridation.

"Like Adam," he said, nodding toward his friend, "I think there are better solutions to the problems of dental cavities than putting fluoride into our water. They could have a fluoride program in the schools, for instance.

"But as a scientist I am very, very upset by the qualities of the arguments against fluoride per se. They are very misleading."

Wedel described science as "an incremental approach to some truth. You never get there completely.

"So many studies say fluoride is safe. A few studies say it's not safe. All studies are not equal. So when any movement latches onto just one study that they like and say that's the truth, it's not intellectually honest."

Rob Thorne, a software engineer who voted against Measure N at the

city museum, was more upset that he had to vote.

"I am very angered that this election even happened at all," said Thorne, 40, who explained that he thinks it's clear that water fluoridation can prevent cavities in children.

"And the people who benefit the most are those who have trouble getting dental care: the poor," he said. "This is a class thing."

But Sherman called the argument that poorer children will suffer without fluoridation "a cop-out, a lame excuse to put a toxic byproduct in the water."

Tom Sullivan and his 5-year-old daughter, Ede, were at the museum — but to look at the exhibits, not to vote. Sullivan, 45, a bicycle mechanic, said he was heading over to his polling place on Mission Street to vote yes on Measure N.

"Adding stuff to water in general is a little beyond what should be done," he said.

Over at Grace United Methodist Church on Soquel Avenue, Millie Johnson was headed to the ballot box to vote yes on N.

"Our water is good the way it is," she said. "I don't want to spoil the taste of it.

Plus, she added, "At my age," — which she said is "over 65" — "I don't think I need fluoride."

Johnson did complain that the measure was confusing, with a yes vote meaning opposition to fluoride and a no vote meaning support for adding the substance to the city water supply.

"In all the years I've been voting I never saw a ballot measure so convoluted."