

# SC rebuffs state rules on fluoride

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SANTA CRUZ — City Council members made it official Tuesday night: There won't be any fluoride added to the municipal water supply unless voters want it.

The 6-1 vote merely was a formality. The majority of the council had made it clear over the past 1½ months that they wanted to rebuff any state effort to force the city to fluoridate its water.

Despite clear indications of the council's position, a rowdy crowd showed up to reiterate its anti-fluoride stance, and to hiss or groan at any comments from the other side.

The council's vote, with Councilwoman Cynthia Mathews continuing her lonely dissent, means that the ordinance will become law in 30 days.

At issue is a mandate passed by the state Legislature in 1995 that requires water districts with more than 10,000 connections to begin fluoridating their supplies once money becomes available to pay for start-up costs.

The state has not allocated any money, however, and is not requiring that local districts dip into their own budgets. Officials hope that private foundations or other groups will agree to foot the bill.

State health officials have said that government lawyers already are looking at Santa Cruz's vote to

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determine if a legal challenge will be filed.

Mathews has been the only council member to consistently side with health-care professionals who cite numerous scientific studies that prove adding fluoride to the water supply isn't harmful. It does, however, dramatically improve dental health, especially among young people, they said.

On the other side are those who believe fluoride is a dangerous medication that can cause health problems. It's especially dangerous, they said, because the level of its ingestion from various sources

other than water can't be adequately regulated.

Councilman Mike Rotkin said he simply had too many unanswered questions to support adding fluoride, a position widely embraced by other members.

At the same time the council was attacking the state's legal ability to force a city to fluoride its water, members also requested that more state money be used to take care of children's dental health needs, especially among low income residents.

Mathews suggested that the state is trying to do something about the problem by mandating fluoride in the water, in addition to paying for dental care for low income people.

"If it's such a great statewide concern, why is it that the Legisla-

ture doesn't approve any money for it (adding fluoride to the water)?" countered Mayor Celia Scott.

Councilman Michael Hernandez, who sided with Mathews two weeks ago when the ordinance first came to the council, voted with the majority this time.

Hernandez said he had a clearer understanding of the ordinance this time around, and he agreed that it would be better to let voters decide the issue.

There won't be a ballot measure any time soon, however. The council doesn't expect to go to the voters unless the state forces its hand by finding money to begin implementing the fluoridation process.