

New fodder for fluoridation

Report reveals increase in additive throughout state; opposition stands firm

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Local fluoridation advocates are applauding a recently released Centers For Disease Control report showing state and national increases in the number of people receiving fluoridated water through public water systems.

SANTA CRUZ
In California, the percentage of the population receiving fluoridated water increased from 15.7 to 28.7 percent between 1992 and 2000. That means about 9.5 million of the more than 33 million Californians drink fluoridated water, according to the study released late last month. Still, California is ranked 44th in the nation in the per-

centage of residents receiving fluoridated water.

"The increase in communities served by fluoridated water systems represents real progress in improving the nation's health," said Dr. Bruce Donald, a Santa Cruz dentist and chair of the Monterey Bay Dental Society's Fluoridation Task Force. "Every increase in community water fluoridation will translate over time to a significant decrease in dental decay and dental disease."

Dr. David McNutt, Santa Cruz County Health Officer, agreed.

"An underlying principle of public health is to reduce health problems and associated costs through programs that are safe, effective and economical," McNutt said.

But not everyone supports the fluoridation of public water supplies. Fluoridation has been a tough issue to swallow for some in Santa Cruz County, where the concept has never been embraced. In March 1998, the Santa Cruz City Council, without a public vote, adopted an ordinance prohibiting the addition of fluoride to its system.

And after the Watsonville City Council in November contracted an engineering firm to develop plans and cost estimates for fluoridation of that city's water supply, members of an opposition group announced plans to put a stop to the process.

The fluoridation opposition group, Watsonville Citizens for Safe Drinking Water,

began circulating a petition in support of what it calls the Watsonville Safe Drinking Water Initiative. If the petition garners at least 1,300 signatures, the initiative could be placed on a citywide ballot in November.

Allowing the addition of fluoride to the public water supply could open a floodgate for the addition of other chemicals or medications, said Dan Hernandez, group spokesman.

"There are so many problems with our water now without adding anything else," Hernandez said. "I would rather stick with what's good already — pure, clean, everyday water."

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