

City stands behind fluoride vote, stance could prompt showdown with state

Fluoridation
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City voters rejected fluoridating the city's public water supply last month. Now, the City Council says it will stand behind the vote, despite the fact that could prompt a showdown with state officials.

WATSONVILLE In a letter this week to Jon Roth, executive director of the California Dental Association Foundation, City Manager Carlos Palacios on behalf of the council rejected the nearly \$1 million grant offered by the Fluoridation 2010 Work Group to pay for start-up fluoridation costs. The group is a collaboration of several dental-health agencies, including the state Department of Health Services, the Dental Health Foundation and the California

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Dental Association Foundation.

"Because voters passed this measure, the council has directed me ... to exercise its right ... to be excused from the Fluoridation Reimbursement Agreement," Palacios said.

Nick Bulaich, spokesman for the fluoride-opposition group Watsonville Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, said in October that the city's April agreement with the task force contained a termination clause. The contract could be

nullified by either party via written notice for any of several reasons, including a "voter approved initiative or ... ballot measure."

Roth, after learning of the outcome of the public vote, had offered to reduce the amount of time the city had contracted to operate and maintain the fluoridation system after its initial installment from 10 years to one.

However, Palacios pointed out that it would seem "impractical to spend (more than)

\$800,000 to install a fluoridation system that would only be used for one year." After that grant expired, Measure S would prohibit the city from using local money for upkeep of a fluoridation system.

Palacios confirmed Friday that state Department of Health officials, after learning of the city's decision, had vowed to send a letter to the city reiterating its position — that state law overrules local ordinances and that the city must fluoridate regardless of a public vote. It remains to be seen whether the state will force the issue and levy fines if the city refuses to comply.

State Assembly Bill 733 mandates the fluoridation of water systems that have 10,000 or more hookups when funding is provided by

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a source other than the water agency or the taxpayers the water system serves.

After all absentee ballots were tallied, Measure S passed with 50.9 percent of the vote. Though the initiative did not specifically mention fluoride, it was aimed at preventing the city from adding that or other chemicals to the local water supply that are not approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration. Not included were chemicals such as chlorine that make the water safe to drink.

The measure would outlaw the addition of fluoride because the FDA does not regulate the chemical of fluoride to public water supplies.

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