

# Tainted water not for drinking

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SANTA CRUZ — Water contaminated by a chemical spill last year at the Watkins-Johnson company will not be used for drinking water in Scotts Valley after it has been de-contaminated, said the executive director of the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Kenneth R. Jones, the executive director, said a consensus was reached among local, state, and federal agencies at a meeting here Tuesday that the water should be used for purposes other than for drinking.

"The water is going to be in excellent condition, at or above safe drinking levels (after cleansing)," Jones said. But, he added, "The consensus was that it would be impossible, from a public relations standpoint, to sell it to the public."

"If that is the case, I am absolutely delighted by the outcome," said County Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, who was not in attendance at the meeting but had voiced strong opposition to introducing the tainted

water into the Scotts Valley domestic supply even after cleansing.

Instead, Jones said, the various agencies, ranging from the county Environmental Health Department to the U.S. Fish and Game Department, proposed substituting the tainted water for other water uses, such as irrigation, watering of golf courses or other landscaping needs.

"The no waste concept, everyone says, is still of prime importance," said Ray Talley, director of the county Environmental Health Department.

The idea of re-introducing the water into the city's drinking supply was proposed by the Scotts Valley Water District so as not to waste the unknown, but substantial, quantity of water. The company had initially proposed dumping the treated water into Bean Creek.

The water is to be cleaned using 36-foot high air-stripping devices which would separate the contaminants, large amounts of trichloroethylene, an industrial solvent used to clean computer disc

drives, into the air while extracting an estimated 648,000 gallons per day from each of three wells.

The clean-up process, company officials and Jones estimate, could take anywhere from three to ten years and will involve a cost of at least \$1 million.

The spill, which introduced the equivalent of a 55-gallon drum of the industrial solvent into the groundwater around the company and into its septic tank, occurred in April, 1984.

The company blames a disgruntled employee with dumping the TCE down a drain leading into the septic tank. Levels of TCE have reached as high as 750 parts per billion. The Environmental Protection Agency has designated five parts per billion as the legal limit.

Jones, of the regional board, said he expects Watkins-Johnson to submit a final clean-up plan by November and that his staff would prepare a report by mid-January.

By March or April of next year, he said, the board should have the item on its agenda ready for a decision.