

# Fluoride review will conclude possible cancer risks

Fluoridation

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6-14-09

WATSONVILLE — Two years after a California appellate court ordered Watsonville to fluoridate, negotiations for fluoridation terms continue, and so does the investigation of fluoride safety.

But vindication for one side of the debate inches closer.

Late last month, the state Carcinogen Identification Committee, which reviews chemicals to determine toxicity, placed fluoride in the top nine of 38 compounds

for complete review, including possible links to cancer.

Fluoridation opponents in Watsonville, who lost an appellate court battle to ban fluoridation in March 2007, anticipate justice when an investigation of fluoride side effects are published.

"I already feel vindicated," said Nick Bulaich, who since 2002 has spearheaded the effort to ban fluoridation in his hometown. Bulaich looks forward to the results, and thinks the investigation is

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evidence of a problem.

Carcinogen Identification Committee chair, Dr. Thomas Mack could not be reached to comment about why fluoride was ranked high, but released a statement saying it was because of "its widespread use," and stressed that the high priority ranking does not indicate that it is cancer-causing.

The investigation may prove fluoride is harmless.

"The California Dental Association wants this investigation to take place as quickly as possible," said Jon Roth, executive director of the California Dental Association. "A review would put questions that opponents have manipulated to rest."

If found to be harmful, fluoridated water will

require warning labels, but fluoridation will continue, according to the outlines of Proposition 65.

In 2005, a screening of 64 percent of kindergartners at Pajaro Valley Unified School District found more than a third suffered from tooth decay.

California has the second-highest prevalence of tooth decay, behind Arkansas, and lower income children are twice as likely to suffer from dental disease than high income children.

"The best defense against tooth decay for low-income kids is to fluoridate the water," Roth said. "It really is sad that a small percentage of people in Watsonville have been making this so difficult."

Unfortunately, the results are a long way away.

"We don't know when the investigation will begin," said Chris Bowman, a spokesman for the Office of Environment Health Hazard

Association, which also will review the chemical. "No one in this agency can say when they will get around to fluoride, as we have many other compounds to review before it."

Currently, fluoride is an approved chemical for ingestion by the California Environmental Protection Agency and state law requires cities with 10,000 or more residents to fluoridate water if the money is available to do so. Watsonville, which received a \$1.6 million grant from the California Dental Association to fluoridate, is one of those cities, but have yet to add fluoride to the water.

Two years of negotiations after the court ruling, the grant terms are finally coming to a close.

"We are down to the technical aspects," Roth said. "We are hoping to have that done within a couple of months."

Watsonville City Manag-

er Carlos Palacios said that there is no time line for fluoridation construction, but the California Dental Association still has not agreed to take on liability for any unforeseen harm due to fluoride exposure, which has been the main sticking point in negotiations.

And the research for potential fluoride harm remains controversial.

Groups such as the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology claim supporters are financially backed by fluoride companies, while the California and American Dental Associations claim that "the word choice and positioning that opponents take is misleading to the public."

The Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust and Dientes, a dental clinic serving low-income patients, have supported fluoridation, while Citizens for Safe Drinking Water opposes it.