

# City to consider approval of fluoridation grant

Fluoridation 4-9-02

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The council tonight is set to consider approving a grant of nearly \$1 million that would fund the installation of water-fluoridation equipment.

That's expected to draw public comment from a flood of fluoridation opponents.

## WATSONVILLE

In November, city leaders, in a 5-2 vote, approved a contract with an engineering firm to develop fluoridation plans and cost estimates.

After that cost estimate was completed in January, the city applied for grant funding from the Fluoridation 2010 Work Group, a collaboration of several dental-health agencies including the state Department of Health Services, the Dental Health Foundation and the California Dental Association Foundation.

The group offered the city a \$946,000 grant in February. Of that total, \$817,000 would fund the design, purchase and installation of fluoridation facilities. The remainder would cover operations and maintenance costs for a year.

If approved, the grant contract would require the city to operate and maintain the fluoridation

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equipment for at least 10 years.

Now that the city has received funding, it must fluoridate within two years, according to the state Department of Health Services. The system could be implemented in half that time — by March 2003, according to David Koch, public works director.

Still, opponents say the fluoridation grant does not spell defeat to their efforts.

"We anticipated this," said Dan Hernandez, spokesman for Watsonville Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, a group that opposes fluoridation.

In fact, the group is now only a few hundred signatures away from the 1,300 it needs to put the issue to a public vote in November, Hernandez said.

Fluoridation has been in place since 1945 and serves 62 percent of the country's population. Still, the decision has been tough to swallow for some in Santa Cruz County.

In March 1998, the Santa Cruz City Council adopted an ordinance prohibiting the addition of fluoride to its system.

Still, health professionals like Dr. Bruce Donald, a Santa Cruz dentist and chair of the Monterey Bay Dental Society's Fluoridation Task Force, say water fluoridation would prevent some cases of what has become a major health problem in the county.

"Every increase in community water fluoridation will translate over time to a significant decrease in dental disease and decay," Donald said.

According to figures released by the Dientes! Community Dental Clinic in Watsonville, 75 percent of the more than 10,000 students in five Watsonville elementary schools screened by the group had untreated dental decay.

In California, the percentage of the population receiving fluoridated water increased from 15.7 to 28.7 percent between 1992 and 2000, according to a report released in February by the federal Centers For Disease Control.

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