

Judge orders revision of anti-fluoride ballot measure

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A Santa Cruz County Superior Court judge has ordered wording for a ballot measure that would prohibit adding fluoride to the city of Watsonville's water supply if approved by voters in November be revised.

As required by the county's election code, Watsonville City Attorney Alan Smith condensed the wording presented by Watsonville Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, a group opposing fluoridation, into a ballot question no more than 75 words long. Smith also authored an impartial

analysis of the measure. Both were accepted by the City Council in July.

However, the citizens group called Smith's wording misleading and took legal action to have it changed.

"The original ... wording implied that the proposed measure would not allow the use of substances used to purify water, which was never the intent of (our group,)" said spokesman Nick Bulaich.

The previous wording would have required any substance added to the public water supply to be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Under a strict interpretation,

that also might have eliminated the use of chemicals such as chlorine that help make the water safe to drink.

The new wording approved by Judge Robert Attack on Monday clarifies the measure to allow for such water treatments. Bulaich hailed the move, and Smith also said he was pleased with the judge's change, since it helped make the document more clear.

Attack did not approve changing several other points in the measure that the citizens' group had claimed were misleading, including wording

that points out to voters that drinking water is not regulated by the FDA, Smith said.

"An uninformed voter wouldn't know that, but it's true," said Smith. "Nowhere in the ballot question does it say fluoride. My job is to give the information and be fair. I believe I tried to explain it (fairly.)"

The ballot measure will be included in an informational pamphlet that will be mailed to registered voters beginning next month.

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