

Residents, businesses pledge support for Citizens for Safe Drinking Water

Fluoridation

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“Some say, “What? I thought we had to vote for that!” and I say, “In most cities you probably would, but in our city the council takes too much advantage of what they think their powers are.” ”

DAN HERNANDEZ, CITIZENS FOR SAFE DRINKING WATER SPOKESMAN

All's been quiet on the water-fluoridation front for weeks, but opponents say they have just been mustering their forces.

When city officials contracted an engineering firm to develop plans for fluoridation of the city's water supply last month, members of an opposition group said they planned to circulate a petition to put a stop to the process.

Watsonville Citizens for Safe Drinking Water began with only a handful of fluoride opponents but now has a membership of nearly 100 and growing, said Dan Hernandez, group spokesman.

“We haven't started doing anything major yet,” Hernandez said. “The big kickoff will be after the first of the year.”

A number of individuals have pledged their support, several businesses are considering allowing the group to solicit signatures on their premises, and one store has volun-

teered to keep and manage a petition full time, Hernandez said.

The group also has published several copies of a fluoride “pros and cons” sheet. Hernandez said the arguments presented on the flier are similar to those used by the group that kept fluoride out of the water in Santa Cruz.

Many area health professionals support water fluoridation and say it would prevent a number of cases of dental disease — a major county health problem.

In areas where there is a high rate of dental decay, water fluoridation has been shown to reduce the risk of decay by 20 to 40 percent, according to Dr. Bruce Donald, chair of the

Monterey Bay Dental Society's Fluoridation Task Force.

Watsonville has a high rate of dental decay among its children, Donald added. According to figures released by the Dientes! Community Dental Clinic, 75 percent of the more than 10,000 students screened by the clinic at five Watsonville elementary schools had untreated dental decay.

“Water fluoridation would be the most effective way to get this safe method to as many children as possible,” Donald said.

Still, Hernandez says allowing the addition of fluoride to the public water supply could open a floodgate for the eventual addition of other

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chemicals or medications. He says people want to have a choice when it comes to what goes into their drinking water.

Hernandez said he often hears the same line from those he talks to about fluoridation.

“Some say, ‘What? I thought we had to vote for that!’ and I say, ‘In most cities, you probably would, but in our city the council takes too much advantage of what they think their powers are,’” Hernandez said.

City Manager Carlos Palacios has said that those on the council in favor of fluoridation feel the move will be good for the dental health of the city's children.

Hernandez believes the measure will make it onto the March ballot. He said he has collected more than 50 signatures and that nearly every group member could do the same. Measure-backers need the signatures of 1,300 registered voters in the city to qualify the measure for the ballot.

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