

Signs warning of pollution posted along Soquel creek

Signs warning of pollution were posted along Soquel creek and at Capitola beach Friday, by the Santa Cruz county health department, it was announced by Dr. Richard H. Svihus, county health officer.

The signs warn that water from the creek in that area have been determined to be temporarily unsafe for bathing and water sports. This action comes as a result of the last sample of creek water analysed Thursday which revealed a sudden increase in the number of fecal bacteria to a very high level.

The City of Capitola earlier requested an opinion from the county health department as to whether or not they should construct a dam at the mouth of the river as has been done in years past. The health department tested samples of the water of the creek at various locations for several weeks and found the presence of fecal coliform bacteria, indicating fecal contamination of the creek. Although there are not standards set by law for the interpretation of the results, the U.S. Public Health Service has suggested a limit of 200 fecal coliform bacteria per each 100 milliliters of water as an upper level for safe fresh-water swimming and bathing.

Since a number of the water samples tested contained greater than the suggested upper safe limit, the health department submitted its opinion to Capitola, saying it could not recommend building the dam at the mouth of the creek. This recommendation has no effect of law, since the county health department has no authority granted to it by either state or local law to control swimming in fresh water streams based on bacterial counts.

Concerned by the presence of fecal bacteria in the creek, the health department continued to survey and test the water and on June 26th found that the bacterial count had risen from the recommended safe limit of 200 to around 4000 fecal coliforms per 100 milliliters of water. After consultation with the state health department Friday, the local health people posted warning signs along the creek. All persons are urged, for their own safety, to stay out of the creek in the areas posted.

But the posting of warning signs does not end the problem of contamination, say the local health people, who have for the past two weeks been developing a program for control of contamination of inland waters, which will be three-fold.

First, teams of Neighborhood Youth Corps workers will explore the banks of the Soquel creek for sources of contamination (they started Monday.) They will look for the sources of actual or potential contamination such as pipes extending into or near the creek, seepage on the ground, refuse dumped on or near the creek bank, and suspicious odors.

Richard Prince, health department sanitarian, is supervising the youths and will check out any suspicious sources of contamination that are found. Orders for correction or abatement of violations of the California health and safety code will be issued. The department normally issues an average of about 7 to 8 such orders a week throughout the county.

The youths will start at the mouth of Soquel Creek and work upstream. They will also

explore the major tributaries that feed into the Creek. Each individual will carry a letter of introduction to explain what he is doing.

Dan Bayle will lead the teams, which will also include John Silva, David Hermosillo, Robert Sabala, and Jerry Gardner. The work will be done at no expense to the county, since the NYC is federally funded. Following work on the creek, the teams will survey other rivers in the county throughout the rest of the summer.

As part of a program to control contamination of waters, explorations will continue during the coming week into setting a prima facie safe bacterial limit for fresh water swimming and into authorizing the county health department to control swimming when the safe limit is exceeded. And third, efforts will be made to encourage the development of sewage systems wherever possible as the real solution to the problem of contamination of the county's streams and lakes.