

Soquel Water Asbestos Test Results Reviewed

The Soquel Creek County Water District Board has received both good and bad news from results of a long-awaited asbestos fibers test.

The bad news is that high concentrations of water-borne asbestos have been found in one of its wells. The good news is the asbestos apparently isn't originating from the district's asbestos-concrete pipe, but rather from the well water below.

The possible cancer-causing fibers became a campaign issue in last November's election. The question was whether the asbestos fibers remained locked in the walls of the pipes or are released with the dissolving action of the water.

"Relief" was the description given by Assistant District Manager Hank Dodds when informed of the test results.

About 60 percent of the district's pipeline is made of asbestos-concrete just like many other California water agencies. To replace it because of deteriora-

tion would be extremely costly.

The conclusion reached by water board members was that the district's water is not "corrosive" and is not attacking the walls of the asbestos-concrete pipe, releasing the fibers into the water supply.

However, because of an oversight in the first sampling by consultants Brown and Caldwell, a second test will be conducted. It will not be completed for several months.

The first test involved spot checks of water samples taken from three wells in the district and three points in the district's water distribution system.

The highest concentrations of asbestos fibers were 19 million per liter of water measured from the Aptos Creek well on Aptos Creek above Aptos Village. Water from that well normally flows into the Aptos-Seacliff distribution system.

While there were measurable amounts of asbestos fibers as well in the Capitola and La Selva Beach portions of the dis-

trict's system, the result was much less — 2.3 million fibers per liter in Capitola-Soquel and 7.4 million in La Selva Beach.

Samples taken from the water distribution system had far fewer fibers than well samples, ranging from just three hundred-thousandths to 1.5 million per liter.

The samples were taken at homes and businesses that were supposed to be correlated with the water well samples, explained Dodds. Instead, the Aptos samples were taken from two different sections of the district's lines.

The fibers counted in the water samples were so small, added Dodds, that an

electron microscope was used.

Both Dodds and board Vice Chairman Mervyn Garibotto pointed out later there is no evidence or even standards by the state or federal government, saying that even minimal amounts of water-borne asbestos is hazardous.

Garibotto termed the test results as "very nebulous" because of the lack of comparisons. "I really don't feel there's any danger," he added.

Dodds agreed, saying he "wasn't alarmed" at the finding and was relieved the results were so low from the pipeline samples.