

Voters reject Watsonville fluoridation

New city council, state
to have final say on issue

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WATSONVILLE — The final tally on Measure S is in — and it appears those opposed to adding fluoride to the city's water supply have floated to the top. Still, officials say state law may be the final word in the matter.

After all absentee ballots were tallied, the measure apparently passed with 50.9 percent of the vote, or 3,043 votes. Meanwhile, 2,931 voters — 49.1 percent — said no to the measure. A yes vote on the measure meant a voter opposed fluoridation, while a no vote meant a person supported fluoridating the city's water.

It remains to be seen whether the new council, to be seated Nov. 26, will stand on the side of local voters or the state mandate that says the city must fluoridate regardless of the public vote.

Nick Bulaich, spokesman for the fluoridation-opposition group Watsonville Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, is taking a wait-and-see approach.

"We need to see what the council does," he said. "One thing is for sure: A law has been passed by the voters here, and I would fully expect the city attorney (and council) to defend that law."

While City Attorney Alan Smith must wait to see what the council directs him to do, he says the state still mandates that the city fluoridate.

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Fluoridation

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In April, city officials, on a 4-2 vote, accepted a grant of nearly \$1 million from the Fluoridation 2010 Work Group to fund the design, purchase and installation of fluoridation treatment equipment and one year of operation and maintenance.

State health officials have said the city is locked into its decision to fluoridate. State Assembly Bill 733 mandates the fluoridation of water systems that have 10,000 or more hookups when funding to do so is provided by a source other than the water agency or the taxpayers the water system serves.

Chuck Carter, one of five council

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DAN HERNANDEZ, FLUORIDE OPPONENT

members who supported fluoridation, says he believes some people were confused by the initiative's wording and that could have affected the outcome.

Dr. Jim Jacobson, a Watsonville orthodontist and fluoridation supporter, agreed. Jacobson is a member of the city's Dientes! Community Dental Clinic board and the Monterey Bay Dental Society's Fluoridation Task Force.

Though the initiative did not specif-

ically mention fluoride, the measure was aimed at preventing the city from adding that or other chemicals to the local water supply. Not included were chemicals such as chlorine that make the water safe to drink. Still, the federal Food and Drug Administration does not regulate the addition of fluoride to public water supplies.

Jacobson also believes state mandate will be the final authority in deciding the issue.

"If the state is not going to support its own laws, then any small group of citizens can organize and change state law as they see fit," Jacobson said.

Fluoride opponent Dan Hernandez, also a member of the Citizens for Safe Drinking Water group, said the state's money would be better spent on health programs that teach area residents good dental hygiene habits, rather than on fluoridating the city's water.

"The people have spoken," Hernandez said. "I hope the council will take that into consideration. But no matter what, we'll prepare for a lawsuit because that will probably come next."

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