Asbestos in water: 'No health hazards'

The presence of low levels of asbestos in its drinking water supply is typical and presents no health hazards, the Soquel Creek County Water District has been informed by the state Department of Health.

In a letter to the district, Regional Engineer R. E. McMillan said that the asbestos levels indicated in water samples given the state health office by the district "are in the range we are familiar with in most other water supplies where we have this information."

In addition, McMillan said the presence of the asbestos in water "has not been demonstrated to be a physiological problem. Most of the public concern occurs as a carryover of reaction due to asbestos in the breathing atmphosphere. There is no conclusive epidemiological data to connect asbestos in water with disease."

The judgment was made, McMillan said in his letter, based on the information available, some of which was "from literature and and few from observations in California. The fact is, we have only a limited amount of data on asbestos in water supplies in this region." Because of the limited amount of information, the department will continue to monitor the district's water supply to study the effects waterborne asbestos might have on health. "At this juncture we would like to make an annual evaluation by taking four samples three months apart. If the data does not warrant, we may discontinue after one or two sets of samples." And, he cautioned the program might also be called off due to the lack of funds, given the expensive nature of the work.

Because of public concern after tests showed the presence of asbestos in the water, the district gathered samples and submitted them for evaluation by the Health Department. In light of McMillan's letter, presented to the district directors Tuesday night, General Manager Robert Johnson said, "It looks like it's just a natural thing that we have in our water.

"We're pleased to get this information in writing," he said, adding that the district will cooperate with the state. "We're not ignoring the problem and will continue with our evaluation of it."