

# FLUORIDATION: WHERE DO YOU STAND?

## SUMMARY

The Grand Jury received a citizen complaint concerning a proposal under discussion by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors (BOS) to fluoridate public water through dispersal by the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA).

The Grand Jury recognizes this topic is highly controversial. Research on both sides of the issue is voluminous. The Grand Jury takes no position on this issue but recognizes there are many matters of concern. Are residents in favor of fluoridation for all citizens on the public water system or are they in favor of targeting young school-age children who are deemed those most in need of fluoride treatments? Can other methods deliver the same dental health benefits? Are there negative health impacts associated with fluoridation? What are the environmental impacts to agriculture and groundwater run-off?

What are the costs: start up, infrastructure, maintenance, testing? What is the source of funds? Could water rates be affected? Could other County services be affected? Who provides the fluoride?

It is the responsibility of our County citizens to do their own research and let their opinions be known to elected officials before the scheduled BOS decision in early 2014. Members of an educated and concerned community can develop their own views and conclusions on fluoridation. Where do you stand?

## BACKGROUND

The issue of fluoride in drinking water has been debated for decades. Some believe fluoridation of community water is the appropriate way to address dental decay. Others believe topical treatments, reducing sugar intake, and better eating habits would be more effective.

Fluoridation is supported by the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, the Food & Drug Administration, and the American Dental Association. Fluoridation is opposed by the Sonoma County Water Coalition, Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, and the Fluoride Action Network. Fluoridation is currently banned in portions of Continental Europe. The Sierra Club believes that communities should have the option to accept or reject mandatory fluoridation of their water supplies.

## APPROACH

The Grand Jury spoke to County officials and several professionals who are familiar with the topic of fluoridation. We attended community and BOS meetings where fluoridation was discussed. We also conducted background research on fluoridation concerns.



## **DISCUSSION**

State Assembly Bill 733 mandates public water systems to fluoridate their water when at least 10,000 service connections exist and if funds are available. Only the cities of Santa Rosa and Petaluma are over the 10,000 connection benchmark. However, all communities served by the SCWA would be impacted by fluoridation. The Sonoma County Public Health Department is responsible for finding the necessary funds outside of the County's general funds to move forward with fluoridation. Possible funding sources include Federal block grants, private foundation donations, First 5 California, and existing tobacco tax funds. The BOS is responsible to make sure the public is informed of the source of the funds.

A public vote is not required for the implementation of fluoridation. If approved by the BOS, SCWA would be directed to implement fluoridation. As a result, an estimated 350,000 residents receiving water from SCWA in Windsor, Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati, Petaluma, Sonoma, Forestville, the Valley of the Moon district, as well as approximately 50,000 northern Marin County residents, would be affected. There is not an opt-out choice for those receiving public water. Households on well water are not affected.

Fluoride compounds such as calcium fluoride occur naturally; fluoride compounds used in water fluoridation, such as sodium fluoride, do not. It is possible to remove fluoride from drinking water, but not every type of water filter will do so.

The Grand Jury recognizes that fluoridation is a contentious topic. To fluoridate or not: do the research, form your opinion, and let your elected County officials know where you stand.

## **FINDINGS**

- F1. Opposing opinions exist on the topic of fluoridation.
- F2. If you receive a water bill from the city, there is a likelihood that you could be affected by fluoridation.
- F3. Fluoridation will affect a significant portion of the County residents if the Board of Supervisors approves it.
- F4. How fluoridation would be funded has not been disclosed to the public.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. The Board of Supervisors advise and inform all residents by multiple methods, e.g., utility bill inserts, bilingual notices through printed or social media, and radio, of its meetings, hearings, discussions, presentations, and votes relating to fluoridation.
- R2. With respect to fluoridation, the Board of Supervisors make impartial decisions based on the best evidence available, allowing for both pro and con views to be heard.

- R3. The Board of Supervisors communicate to the public how fluoridation would be funded prior to a final vote.
- R4. The Public Health Department advise and inform residents by multiple methods, e.g., utility bill inserts, bilingual notices through printed or social media, and radio, of meetings, hearings, discussions, and presentations relating to fluoridation.

## **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses as follows:

- R1, R2, R3 - Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
- R4 - Sonoma County Director of Health Services

The governing body indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda, and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- AB 733 Speier. Drinking water: fluoridation - [www.leginfo.ca.gov](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov)
- Weston A. Price Foundation - [www.westonaprice.org](http://www.westonaprice.org)
- 50 Reason To Oppose Fluoridation - [www.fluoridealert.org](http://www.fluoridealert.org)
- The Politics of Water Fluoridation - John R. Lee, M.D.
- 2010 Federal census
- Sonoma County Health Services - [www.sonoma-county.org](http://www.sonoma-county.org)
- The Press Democrat
- Sonoma County Fluoridation Assessment Draft Report - February 26, 2013

*Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.*