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Water board lends support

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The Peninsula-based group known as Citizens Concerned About Chloramine received some support yesterday from a local water board in their efforts to rid Hetch Hetchy water of chloramine.

The North Coast County Water District, which serves Pacifica, issued a letter to the Bay Area Water Supply and Conservancy Agency and the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, saying that an Internet search by district staff backs up the group's claim that no epidemiological, respiratory or dermatological studies have been done to support or dismiss their claims.

Citizens Concerned About Chloramine President Denise Kula-Johnson said the group will take the letter and show it to local officials.

Safety studies

"What we're asking lawmakers to do is make SFPUC stop using chloramine until they do studies showing us that it's safe," Kula-Johnson said. She added that

they might pursue a campaign to inform the public and get a bond measure to fund alternative cleansing methods for the water supply.

The letter urged that local and San Francisco water officials press state and federal agencies to conduct health studies on the ingestion of chloramine. BAWSCA officials have previously said that they are not health experts, and rely on the findings of public health officials such as San Mateo County Health Officer Scott Morrow, who earlier this year signed a letter calling chloramine the safest alternative for disinfecting the Bay Area water supply.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, which owns the Hetch Hetchy system and supplies water to most of the Peninsula, has said it switched to chloramine because it lasts longer in the water supply than chlorine and because it is believed to produce fewer of certain cancer-causing chemicals. Most major utilities now use chloramine, according to commission officials.

Added to the water supply in February 2004, chloramine is a disinfectant that CCAC believes causes skin irritations, respiratory problems and digestive irritations. Kula-Johnson cited studies done by the industrial hygiene industry, the Center for Disease Control and the Environmental Protection Agency that said at higher concentration levels chloramine causes respiratory and other kinds of irritations. Yet, there have been no studies on its effects at water-disinfection levels, she said.

Violent respiratory attacks

Kula-Johnson, who studied biochemistry at UCLA, said she travels to Morgan Hill to take showers because of violent respiratory attacks she began getting just a day after chloramine was added to the water supply. With no previous history of respiratory problems, she said her doctor ruled her episode a chemical reaction and ordered her not to shower at home.

Her group has documented more than 120 cases they believe to be related to chloramine in the water.