

Drinking water study proposed

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■ Group wants a closer look at chloramine, asthma rates

By Christine Morente

STAFF WRITER

SAN MATEO — Marilyn Raubitschek can't take a bath or cook with tap water until she removes the disinfectant chloramine that causes sores on her skin.

The scars on her legs are reminders that taking showers is now off-limits because of chloramine.

"Of course, I won't drink it," the San Mateo resident said. "If I use it just plain on my body, I can't stand it."



RUSKIN

Raubitschek is with a non-profit group aggressively lobbying local and state officials to remove the chlorine-ammonia disinfectant from the water system until dermal and inhalant studies are done.

Last month, Assemblyman Ira Ruskin, D-Redwood City, helped the Citizens Concerned About Chloramine (CCAC) by introducing a bill that would examine "potentially dangerous drinking water disinfection by-products and their persistence in the environment."

I share their concerns, and that is why I introduced AB2402 to explore this issue further."

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Group wants closer look at chloramine in area water

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said Ruskin, chair of the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials, in a statement Tuesday.

In its current form, AB2402 would require the state Department of Health Services (DHS) to look for "water treatment methods, technologies, and other management options that reduce or eliminate the need to add disinfectants or additives to

critical for public health," Winnicker said. "All the research available so far, suggests that chloramine is the safest, most cost-effective drinking water disinfection. (But) we'll work with the state."

He said the reason for the switch from chlorine to chloramine is to cut back on the high level of trihalomethanes, a carcinogenic byproduct. Since the conversion, the SFPUC saw the trihalomethane level drop by half in its regular measurement of water quality.

drinking water."

The bill is expected to go to a policy and appropriations committee before hitting the Assembly floor.

The water disinfectant was put into the San Francisco Hetch Hetchy system in February 2004 and was considered by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission to be the best form of disinfection.

It's unsafe for fish, amphibians and reptiles, and for people on dialysis. Chloramine also cannot be removed from water

"It's virtually nil," Winnicker said.

CCAC Founder Denise Johnson-Kula said the group proved that there are no scientific studies done on the effects of chloramine and that cancer studies are incomplete.

The group also wants the public health department to look into asthma rates among children before and after chloramine was added, she said.

"Why is it being put in the water when it was not tested for these effects?" Johnson-Kula

by boiling it. According to the SFPUC, it can only be neutralized or removed through specific treatment methods.

More than 200 San Mateo County, East Bay and Santa Clara residents have documented respiratory and skin problems to the CCAC.

SFPUC Spokesman Tony Winnicker said the commission welcomes studies that check water disinfection techniques.

"From our perspective, drinking water disinfection is

asked. "Cancer will take a while to develop, but people are having severe respiratory effects now."

She said that Ruskin's bill would need to be fine-tuned.

"It's very general at this point," Johnson-Kula said. "It's exciting that he's taking this very seriously. It's all over California, not just our system."

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