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Crossed lines led to region's fluoridation foul up

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A communication breakdown between regional departments meant Waterloo citizens didn't know that the fluoride has been turned off in the city for the majority of this year.

According to a public health memo released Friday, water services staff at the Region of Waterloo weren't aware of a provincial law requiring the health unit to notify the public if water wasn't being fluoridated for more than 90 days.

Due to a number of breakdowns in the system, fluoridation has been stopped in most of Waterloo since March. But the public — along with regional councillors and City of Waterloo staff — didn't find out until Nov. 13 that the fluoride was off.

It was bad timing, as fluoride has become a big issue in the city. Waterloo voters will decide whether to end fluoridation in a plebiscite during the next municipal election.

"Water Services was not aware of the protocol requiring notification of low fluoride levels," the memo read.

The memo was in part a response to questions asked by city Coun. Angela Vieth, who has been strongly against fluoridating Waterloo's water.

Vieth was not pleased with the answers she received.

"I'm not satisfied," she said. "Public health and water services are not doing their jobs in the case of water fluoridation.

"Whose job is it to make water services aware of the protocols? I believe it's public health's."

Vieth submitted a Freedom of Information request on Nov. 17 to access all the correspondence between public health and water services on this matter.

"I'm waiting for a response," she said. "I think we'll get more answers then."

As a result of the late notification, water services will now issue a monthly report to public health on fluoride levels.

Regional Coun. Sean Strickland still has strong concerns about the communication breakdown, but is confident it won't happen in the future.

"Staff has received a strong enough message that if a breakdown occurs in the future, regional councillors will be notified sooner," he said.

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