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Debate left to fluoride opponents

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It was a rather one-sided debate last Thursday with the dentists pulling a no-show in the second official forum on water fluoridation.

They left the floor open for water fluoridation opponents at the Waterloo Memorial Recreation Complex. Their presentation featured water quality experts and personal testimonials.

Andrew Hilliard, the president of Wonderful Waterloo, a local civic-minded group that took over the forum as a neutral third party, opened the evening by asking any proponents of water fluoridation to come forward. He was greeted with silence by the audience of 40 people.

Hilliard did point to a table with brochures provided by the Ontario Dental Association set up for information purposes. The dental association's literature included the caveat: "Be aware of misinformation relating to water fluoridation on the Internet." The brochure then asks people to visit the ODA's website.

That contradiction was pointed out by Peter van Caulart, a water expert who has spent 30 years training water operators in Ontario including eight years with the Ministry of the Environment. The "trust us" message is a common one, he said, considering dentists main area of expertise simply deals with oral health.

Van Caulart claimed no special medical knowledge, but said as far as he knows he is the only water operator in Ontario accredited and trained in the U. S. by the national fluoride engineer sanctioned by the U.S. Centre for Disease Control.

And what he knows about the use of hydrofluorosilicic acid, which is used to fluoridate the water supply, has turned him into a vocal opponent, including a successful battle to keep it turned off in the Niagara region, where he lives.

"The one thing you'll hear from people is, 'Isn't it good for you teeth?'" said van Caulart. "I don't know, I'm a water guy, but what I do know is that swallowing it is not good for your body.

"Is it safe to consume over a lifetime? I don't know because nobody has done the studies. I couldn't find that information, and when I couldn't find it the light went on."

That lack of information and investigation also had Heather Gingerich, a PhD candidate in the fledgling field of medical geology, worried about the possible long-term effects of ingestion and use of fluoridated water.

"Is there a benefit (for teeth)? Yes but it's small," said Gingerich, saying it buys you one Ph of protection to the acidity that eats away at tooth enamel. "But did they even look at the effects on the thyroid gland, the brain, the kidneys? No they didn't."

Alice Terpstra, a Torontobased nutritionist, provided a human face to the long-term effects of water fluoridation. She said she was part of the first study of kids and water fluoridation in Grand Rapids, Mich., in the mid-1940s. It left her with a lifetime of health problems.

“I’m living proof that fluoridation is a fraud,” she said.

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