



ELMIRA Independent

Fluoridation issue deserves a close look

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The debate is a passionate

one — do we continue to add fluoride to our water, or don't we?

While the issue has fallen beneath the radar of most Woolwich residents, who may deem this to be a city issue, the reality is somewhat different.

Both Elmira and St. Jacobs residents are currently having fluoride added to their drinking water, through an agreement with the Region of Waterloo. The city of Waterloo has opted to have its water fluoridated, and Elmira and St. Jacobs, by default, is included, since we get our drinking water from the city.

Public health officials indicate that fluoride-supplemented water does a great deal of good. It helps prevent cavities, particularly in low-income families that may not be able to afford dental care.

Opponents, however, list a whole range of health problems that may be associated with the addition of fluoride, and note that the type of fluoride used — hydrofluorosilicic acid — has traces of lead, arsenic and mercury in it.

The debate will be dealt with through a referendum at the upcoming municipal election, set for this fall.

The question is — will this end the debate?

A referendum is only valid, after all, if enough voters take the time to mark their ballot.

Given the abysmally low voter turnout in Woolwich Township in the last two municipal elections — 27.03 per cent in 2006, and 22.98 per cent in 2003 — it is unlikely that we will see the kind of referendum results that make it clear how residents feel on the issue.

It is actually quite likely that few voters will actually know how they feel on this issue, because they don't have enough information at hand.

The tendency in our Canadian culture is to trust those in authority, to assume they know what they are talking about. In this case, we suspect most residents will side with fluoridation, since our health officials tell us we need it.

Still, given the concerns raised by such groups as Waterloo Watch, it would be a useful exercise for the Region of Waterloo to hold information forums on the issue — giving equal time to those who have concerns about the potential health impacts of fluoridation.

That's the only way that the residents of this Region will get the information they need to make an informed choice, come Oct. 25.

And if they can't make an informed choice, there really is no point in having a referendum at all, is there?



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