

Fluoride to be removed from water by end of the year | ObserverXtra.com By: James Jackson

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Residents can expect the flow of fluoride to stop by the end of this year after parts of Woolwich Township and the City of Waterloo, in one of the closest election results in recent memory, voted 'no' to the continued fluoridation of their water supply.

The 'no' vote passed by the slimmest of margins, 50.3 per cent, which was fewer than 200 votes. In Woolwich it was even closer; 1,960 voted 'no' and 1,942 voted 'yes' to fluoridation.

The vote is a victory for anti-fluoridation advocate Robert Fleming, who has spent the past four years studying the effects of fluoridated water on the human body, and has rallied against the chemical through his advocacy group, WaterlooWatch.

"I think in the face of scientific evidence pointing to the benefits, and you couple that with the scientific evidence pointing to the possibility of harm, that a 'no' vote will serve this community very well," he said.

Fleming contends that the science supporting fluoridation is out of date and the process adds traces of lead, arsenic and other contaminants to the water, while only reducing the number of cavities by one per person over a lifetime of drinking fluoridated water.

Leading up to the election, pro-fluoride groups rallied to keep the chemical in the water supply. At a public meeting on Oct. 21, Health Canada's chief dental officer, Dr. Peter Cooney, warned that removing fluoride from the water would lead to a rise in tooth decay in Waterloo Region. He added that adding fluoride to the water supply – as Waterloo has done since 1967 – has led to a 20 to 40 per cent reduction in cavities. Dentists also say that lower rates of tooth decay and cavities in Waterloo compared to parts of Kitchener and Cambridge that do not fluoridate the water is also proof that the system works.

"I appreciate that dentists have their job to do," Fleming noted, "but I also appreciate that citizens have the right to say through the vote, 'We do not consent to be medicated.' And that's what the vote has said."

Fluoridation in Waterloo is achieved by adding hydrofluorosilicic acid to the water, with a fluoride content between 0.5 and 0.8 parts per million (ppm).

There is still much work that needs to be done before the fluoride can be removed from the system. Nancy Kodousek, the director of water services in the region, said the issue will go before a regional council committee on Nov. 16, and then to council as a whole on Nov. 24, where it is expected a new bylaw will be written to stop the fluoridation of the water supply.

She says the goal is to halt the fluoride additives by the end of the year.

"We're just working towards the orderly review of our chemical just to make sure we can properly turn it off and decommission it," she said.

The equipment at the four pumping stations needs to be disconnected and is going to be decommissioned, but the sites themselves – which Kodousek said includes wells that are still active parts of the water system infrastructure – will remain operational.

Water in Elmira and St. Jacobs has been piped in from Waterloo since 1992, after Elmira's aquifers became contaminated with chemicals from the Uniroyal (now Chemtura) plant.