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# Get the lead out, says councillor

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Published on Sep 17, 2008

Worries about lead in the water in some of Waterloo's older homes led Waterloo city Coun. Angela Vieth to volunteer her house up as a testing site for Ministry of the Environment officials.

But living in the relatively newer area of Lakeshore Village, she thought there was no way her postwar home would have any problems with lead in the water. So, you can imagine her surprise when she learned her home tested higher than the acceptable government standard under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

"It was three points above," said Vieth. "There are no lead pipes in our house because it was built in the early 1970s and it should be safe.

"I was totally shocked and it took me a little while to calm down."

The acceptable standard for lead in water is 10 parts per million, said Vieth, and while her family home tested out below that standard in January, the follow-up test in July said the lead content was now at 13 p.p.m.

It left her wondering if her home and family were affected by these high levels of lead, who else in her neighbourhood would have similar results. She was especially fearful for her next-door neighbours, a young couple who just had a new baby, and is considering asking her neighbours to get some private testing done on the homes in her area.

"I really feel obligated to go over there and have a chat with them," said Vieth.

And while she was told by MOE officials that it wasn't a big deal, they also gave her a booklet on precautions to take if the lead level is high. The side effects of long-term exposure to lead are also well known and include damage to the nervous system, kidneys and circulatory system.

"There were five pages of precautionary things to do," said Vieth. "That concerns me."

But what irked her even more was the rest of city councils' response, especially with a late agenda item included in the Sept. 8 council meeting changing the existing City of Waterloo water services bylaw.

The old bylaw read: "The Regional Municipality of Waterloo is the sole supplier of water to the city's distribution system. The city does not guarantee the supply, quality or pressure of water to consumers and failure to supply water shall not be construed as neglect on the part of the city."

The new bylaw drops references to the city's role as the water distributor, and had Vieth asking some tough questions about the local municipality remaining silent on its own duties and responsibilities as operator of the distribution system.

"I didn't want to bring lead up at the discussion, but it's all connected," said Vieth. "The lead, the fluoride ... it's in our pipes.

"I'm a regular water user and I'm not running my taps for five minutes before I have a drink - who does that?"

Vieth didn't delve too much into the fluoride issue with the rest of council, but her concerns tie into recent research she's seen from Carol Clinch, a local member of People for Safe Drinking Water, which is fighting to get water fluoridation stopped in Waterloo.

Clinch recently submitted petitions to the Environmental Commissioners of Canada and Ontario detailing research that shows that fluoride increases lead levels in blood in communities that use hydrofluorosilicic acid for water fluoridation. Fluoride is also a corrosive

and she said it is now known that lead leaches from lead pipes, lead solder and leaded brass by mechanical and chemical interactions with fluorosilicates.

Discoloured water has long been a concern in areas of Waterloo with no simple explanation for its appearance. But the addition of fluoride might be one factor, according to Clinch's research.

"These homes are not old, they are 30- or 40-year-old homes," she said. "Lead is the second most common contaminant in hydrofluorosilicic acid.

"Indirectly there's a fairly good body of research that fluorosilicates are used to dissolve lead and brass.

"We have leaded pipes, leaded solder and leaded brass in our infrastructure - it's loaded with it."

Vieth said it's another important reason why the practice of water fluoridation should be stopped in Waterloo.

"Turn the lead off," said Vieth. "Get the hydrofluorosilicic acid out of our tap water."

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