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## Ironclad guarantees can rust

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The Chronicle's front page article "Hands slapped' in fluoride fallout" on May 5 reveals not just a breakdown in communications among the local health department, the region's water services, and regional government, but surprisingly cavalier attitudes to these events and to future probabilities.

The attitudes of elected politicians especially are naive and sanguine.

Assurances that "it won't happen again", and that "steps have been taken" are bland and superficial, not at all reassuring.

The Region of Waterloo treats our drinking water with two chemical concentrates, chloramine to kill micro-organisms and artificial fluoride to prevent/treat dental cavities.

Both are very potent chemicals. They have strong corrosive and reagent properties.

It is not surprising that breakdowns occurred at all the major fluoride injection points in Waterloo in May 2009 when one factors in the age and condition of the corroded equipment.

The pumping stations have a posted notice warning workers never to mix the two — the consequences would be lethal.

Confusion over the time needed for repairs and the availability of replacement parts saw staff and public health officials refusing to admit that they had a problem.

Were they hoping it would just go away, and that nobody would notice?

Or did they want to be able to place responsibility with the other party?

The upshot was the entire city received unfluoridated water until well past Aug. 28, long after Ministry of Health reporting deadlines.

And six months after the shut down, public health finally revealed the full extent of the breakdowns to the public.

Fluoridation was fully restored in December.

The Chronicle's investigation revealed that neither water services nor public health were able to determine precisely who received drinking water from which particular failed fluoridation feed-point.

What if next time such a fluoridation feed-point dangerously over-fed, rather than under-fed, this toxic chemical?

Would citizens be notified in a timely fashion so they could take appropriate action?

Our Regional Chair Ken Seiling said "It's transparent and wide open...the checks and balances going on in the water system are ironclad."

Iron rusts. Brass is not bound.

Mr. Seiling concludes "In this case was anybody harmed, was there any threat to public health?"

He further states "The fact that fluoride was dropped for a few months, I don't think was a threat to public health and I don't think

anybody was endangered by it.”

I would draw a slightly different conclusion: Nobody was hurt this time.

And the incident proves a point for those opposed to fluoridation.

This artificially added chemical is not necessary.

Those who want it can easily find it in a pure and stable form in tooth pastes and mouth rinses.

There is no need to endanger the internal health of anyone by requiring them to drink the stuff.

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