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Drinking Water Debate

March 2010 [Features](#)



Is Fluoridation Endangering Public Health in Favour of Government and Corporate Interests?

by Aliss Terpstra

Water fluoridation chemicals are a byproduct of the phosphate fertilizer industry. This is an industry which produces toxic emissions of fluoride gas; these emissions are captured at the fertilizer plant by pollution control devices called 'wet-scrubbers' and become hydrofluorosilicic acid or HFSA (a classified hazardous waste). Once collected, it is pumped into tankers and sold, unrefined, to communities across the continent. These municipalities then add HFSA to their water supplies as the primary chemical for water fluoridation.

Twelve years after Dr. Hardy Limeback apologized to his University of Toronto graduating dental students for wrongly teaching that fluoridation did no harm, and four years after the U.S. National Research Council report showed that babies and iodine deficient adults are harmed at very low fluoride intake, Ontario is still the most heavily fluoridated province in Canada (about 76% of 12 million people are exposed). Visible dental fluorosis affects almost half of school-aged children in fluoridated areas.

When diluted in chlorinated water, the corrosive action of HFSA leaches two to five times more lead (a heavy metal) from pipes and fittings into tap water than does chlorinated water by itself.

According to the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), "The intake of fluoride from drinking water is uncontrolled, and can lead to dental fluorosis in children who are inclined to drink large amounts of water. Both natural and artificially fluoridated water can cause this effect, which is, of course, simply a visible representation of an effect on the entire bony skeleton. The cost of repairing teeth damaged by fluorosis is not trivial; moderate to severe effects can require \$15,000 or more in dental fees."

In its position paper on drinking water fluoridation, CAPE goes on to say: "Animal studies have shown a wide range of adverse effects associated with fluoride. It has been shown to be a potential immunotoxin, embryotoxin, neurotoxin and harmful to bony tissues, including both dental and ordinary bone. In addition, it can damage (inhibit) thyroid function in several species, including humans. Its effect on ecosystem balance has been little researched, but is unlikely to be positive."

In fact, the evidence of harm is immense, as attested to by the 2006 National Research Council report. This report identifies fluoride as an "endocrine disruptor", and its overdose effects on teeth are described as "adverse." The conclusion is that current limits in drinking water don't protect health. Harm to the thyroid and a baby's brain begins at the intake level of 0.01 mg/kg/day with associated iodine deficiency. Yet the fluoride intake that Health Canada recommends as fine for all infants (whose formula is likely mixed with fluoridated tap water) is 12 times higher! Health Canada offers no credible scientific evidence to support this recommendation.

Response from Government

We have some very good laws, but they are not being applied. Our municipal councillors have the authority to stop fluoridation at any time by majority vote. The Ontario Fluoridation Act says so. We ought to be able to phone up the water department and tell them to shut fluoridation off simply because of the associated increase in arsenic and leached lead in our tap water. Section 20 of the Ontario Safe Drinking Water Act gives us that right. In addition, our Charter of Rights

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and Freedoms is in place to protect us from being deceived by a health authority into swallowing a toxic substance that can alter health and appearance.

Health Canada regulations already forbid the sale of any unapproved substance administered alone, in food, or water as an unlicensed drug or supplement with a false claim of preventing disease (tooth decay). The Ontario Ministry of Environment could adopt the more protective federal guideline (also ignored) for fluoride in source water (0.12 mg/L) as a regulation. Ontario's Attorney General could enforce the sections of the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act regarding deliberate water pollution with known hazardous chemicals that are unnecessary for water treatment.

The position of government and dental associations is to support a fixed concentration of fluoride at 0.7 parts per million (ppm) in water. Health Canada asserts this is safe for everyone and that this does not cause overdose through accumulation – no matter how much you drink.

Yet it is destructive to democracy and human rights when a non-elected body in government or private commerce claims authority to recommend the pollution of drinking water with a cumulative, toxic chemical that is now shown by independent scientific research to harm children. These findings are simply ignored by government and industry.

Despite these legislative options and the verifiable evidence of harm without significant dental benefit, there are now plans to make water fluoridation an Ontario-wide health policy.

The Ontario Government is being lobbied by the Ontario Dental Association, certain public health groups, and the regulatory college that governs dentists (operating in concordance with Health Canada), to implement fluoridation as a provincial policy – thus removing all control and the exercise of informed consent from Ontario's municipal electorate. Unbelievably, the minutes of the Council of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario from June 4, 2009 state: "Support for Fluoridation: Council approved a joint effort with the leadership of the College and the Ontario Dental Association to meet and develop an approach to promote the use of fluoridation in all Ontario municipalities with one unified approach throughout the province."

This professional trade association and the regulatory body with a monopoly on dental health care, not democratically accountable to the public, are urging our elected representatives to remove our right to stop fluoridation, the main cause of dental fluorosis.

As the Ontario Fluoridation Act does not allow mandatory fluoridation, what are we to think? Dentists who speak out against fluoridation fear losing their licence to practise dentistry. The Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario has a policy requiring dentists to publicly and professionally support water fluoridation. If you have ever wondered why an otherwise holistic, well-informed dentist doesn't want to get involved, this could be the reason.

A History of Public Controversy

When it became public that there was no toxicological information on fluoridation chemicals being used, and that Section 20 of the Ontario Safe Drinking Water Act was simply being ignored, two Waterloo residents, Carole Clinch and Robert J. Fleming, petitioned the Ministry of Environment under the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR), demanding a review of the use of fluoridation chemicals in drinking water and the effects of their discharge into the ecosystem. The petition was granted in 2008 and the review was due for completion this year.

The review is now on hold, waiting for a new federal fluoride guideline from Health Canada which had published a draft guideline in 2009. It was seriously flawed, containing blatant errors about the safety of fluoride consumption and misleading statements. It even omitted some of the most important science, such as the earlier mentioned NRC report. Fortunately, this provoked a storm of public comments from individuals, organizations such as Council of Canadians, and leading scientists. Carole Clinch filed a petition with Canada's Auditor General demanding an inquiry. Now Health Canada must truthfully answer the petition before it can release another fluoride guideline.

However, Ontario does not need permission from Health Canada to complete its own environmental review. Ontario has full authority to set its own drinking water and source water quality regulations. This is where public involvement comes in.

All legislation is mandated to "serve and protect the public interest." This province has the primary responsibility to protect the integrity of half of the Great Lakes, plus the Ottawa Valley and James Bay watersheds. It is in clear violation of the public interest to conduct a risk assessment of fluoridation on the environment and human health by choosing to rely on obsolete dental dogma and the pronouncements of a federal panel that did not include a single expert on fluoride toxicity or environmental biology.

Federal Interference in Local Decision Making

Fluoridation is supposed to be subject to democratic municipal decision making. But when fluoridation is questioned at the local level, Health Canada often appears on the scene in the person of its chief dental officer, Dr. Peter Cooney, and applies pressure on councillors to vote for fluoridation. This meddling is not part of Health Canada's mandate. Despite Health Canada throwing its weight around, the Niagara Region, Dryden, Kingston, and Thunder Bay councils voted down fluoridation on scientific and practical grounds.

Dr. Cooney worked hard to convince Dryden to keep fluoridating, saying he "didn't see anyone growing horns from drinking the water." Unbelievably, he even told Red Lake council that "dental fluorosis was not caused by drinking fluoridated water" (even Health Canada admits this), and he told Thunder Bay council that British Columbia has so little fluoridation because the people there are just "environmental tree-hugger types."

Halton Region Standing Committee voted to recommend that council end fluoridation, but council blocked deputations from the public and deferred the difficult decision, under intense lobbying from Dr. Cooney and the dental groups. According to recent public health statistics, Halton Region's fluoridated areas, such as Oakville, have more than 10% of adolescent children with irreversible moderate to severe dental fluorosis, known as an "adverse effect" of fluoride overdose received before age six.

Astonishingly, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit spent \$90,000 of taxpayers' money on lobbying for fluoridation. Dr. Cooney was paid \$23,800 for his consulting services for 2009. He visited Thunder Bay several times and lectured individual councillors on the need to fluoridate the pristine water sourced from Lake Superior. But Thunder Bay councillors deserve medals for integrity. Thunder Bay water department conducted its own independent tests and found that adding fluoridation chemicals at Health Canada's recommended level of 0.7 ppm caused a nearly three-fold increase in lead leached into the drinking water. Dr. Cooney dismissed this objective finding.

The federal fluoridation lobby claimed support from First Nations groups – whose leaders had not even been consulted and did not want fluoridation. Local councillors were aware of evidence that First Nations people already have high rates of dental fluorosis and pregnant women are more at risk from fluoride toxicity. Dr. Cooney ignored this, too.

Similarly, the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario misinformed the City of Hamilton, which had reservations in 2008 about spending millions to replace aging fluoridation equipment. (Hamilton's air is heavily contaminated by fluoride due to steel industry emissions.)

Dr. Frank Stechey, president of the body that governs dentists, addressed Hamilton council, claiming that Peel Region had initiated fluoridation of Caledon community wells – the pristine aquifer water that Helke Ferrie drinks – because Caledon children had more tooth decay than Brampton children who drank fluoridated water. (In fact, the 2007 study by Dr. Dick Ito found there was no benefit from fluoridation in Brampton; the lowest cavity rate was in children who took a daily multivitamin.)

Peel Region had voted in 2004 to expand fluoridation, but had no plans to start fluoridating the Caledon wells, thanks in part to the efforts of Dr. Robert Ferrie, Helke's husband. The Ito study was not available then, and does not support fluoridation. But Stechey's misleading input may have tipped the Hamilton council vote – by one – to keep fluoridating their water supply.

Public Activism Needed Now

So what is a concerned public to do? We can buy water purifiers and filters for our homes (see page 64, 65, 98), or bring in bottled spring water (Cedar Springs sells it in glass bottles). And we can become involved in the politics of health. We can do everything our democracy permits and requires from us. We may expose the actions of public health officials by using the Freedom of Information Access process and prove that misuse of their authority and abuse of our trust is a reality. We can hold them accountable.

We can also work towards gathering the signatures of 10% of all the eligible voters in each fluoridated community to force the issue to become a plebiscite question on the municipal election ballot this fall.

We can also choose to buy local, sustainably grown food, so farmers who produce real food can make a living. Organic farmers use only natural fertilizers without phosphates. On the other hand, factory farming is dependent on costly phosphate fertilizers made from fossil fuels. Safe



disposal of phosphate fertilizer factory waste (HFSA) is very expensive and a financial liability for Big Agribusiness – which would prefer to sell this poison at a profit to our municipalities. Each dollar a city spends on this toxic waste for water fluoridation provides a \$10 subsidy to Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland. It also imposes a tariff on farmers who care about soil, water quality and humane animal husbandry.

In 2009, Toronto's fluoridation policy added about a million kilograms of phosphate fertilizer waste in treated sewage to Lake Ontario and simultaneously undermined local sustainable food production by nearly \$10 million. It's time to make this stop.

Resources:

- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->National Research Council 2006 report: Fluoride Action Network (a U.S. organization) www.fluoridealert.org
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Legislation regulating fluoridation and drinking water, Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights petition on fluoridation: www.waterloowatch.com
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Groups working to end fluoridation: Council of Canadians: www.canadians.org - torontochapter@gmail.com. Tel: (613) 233-2773; 1-800-387-7177
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Regenesis Canada (a Toronto group - Vote OUT Fluoride – will have a meeting on the last Saturday of every month to organize and plan for a municipal campaign to end fluoridation in Toronto's public water. All are welcome to attend. New members are encouraged. Location: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Across St. George station, Room 5-250. 6-7:15pm. Email: voteoutfluoride@gmail.com, or go to: www.theregenesisproject.com; www.voteoutfluoride.com;
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->People For Safe Drinking Water www.newmediaexplorer.org/chris/2009/10/26/people_for_safe_drinking_water.htm
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Health Action Network Society, Burnaby, British Columbia website: www.hans.org

Sources:

- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Canadian statistics for 2007: Total population 31,611,911; population in artificially fluoridated areas: 14,258,078; Ontario population, artificially fluoridated: 9,229,015.
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Ontario Dental Association Facts and FAQs www.youororalhealth.ca American Dental Association and Centers for Disease Control advice to avoid fluoridated water for making baby formula due to risk of dental fluorosis: www.ada.org/prof/resources/positions/statements/fluoride_infants.asp
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->
>www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/factsheets/brushup.htm
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Ontario Dental Association President urging mandatory water fluoridation in Ontario www.waterloowatch.com/kirshen video.html
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario President, on consequences for dissenting dentists www.waterloowatch.com/stechey video.html
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Dr. Peter Cooney of Health Canada giving inaccurate reply to Thunder Bay Council www.waterloowatch.com/cooneyvideo.html
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->The Effects of Fluoridating Agents on the Chemistry of Thunder Bay Drinking Water: http://www.newmediaexplorer.org/chris/Vukmanich_2009_Effects_Fluoridating_Agents_Water_Chemistry.pdf
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment: www.newmediaexplorer.org/chris/CAPE_Fluoridation_statement.pdf Tel: 416-306-2273
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->International Society for Fluoride Research Journal: www.fluorideresearch.org
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Bibliography of Scientific Literature: www.slweb.org/bibliography.html
- <!--[if !supportLists]--> <!--[endif]-->Christopher Bryson, The Fluoride Deception, Seven Stories Press, 2004