



Fluoride flap

Questions raised after fluoridation turned off for repairs

Greg MacDonald, Chronicle Staff

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Water fluoridation in the City of Waterloo has been turned off for a large portion of the year as repairs to water mains and other injection sites prevented the chemical from being added to the water supply.

Provincial law requires that the medical officer of health notify communities when fluoride is absent from the water for more than 90 days.

Officials could not say why notification did not occur earlier.

Since March, 30 per cent to 100 per cent of the city's homes were not being fluoridated. Sixty per cent of homes are still not receiving fluoridation as some repairs are ongoing.

At regional council yesterday, Waterloo city Coun. Angela Vieth questioned why the region hadn't notified the municipality about the fluoride being turned off.

"The first thing that occurred to me is why it took them so long to tell us," said Vieth, who has been fluoride's most vocal opponent on city council.

"It's like they're trying to hide something."

Repairs are common, said Medical Officer of Health Dr. Liana Nolan, but she would have liked to see the process move quicker.

"Ideally the equipment is up and running within 90 days," she said.

"It is what it is."

Bill Garibaldi, the director of water services for the City of Waterloo, said he didn't know until last week that fluoride had essentially been turned off.

Regional staff were directed to put together answers to some of Vieth's questions.

Waterloo is the only city in the region that chemically fluoridates its water. Residents will vote on whether to end the practice in a referendum slated for the 2010 municipal election.

Fluoride is applied to Waterloo's water in three main pumping stations — two on Erb Street and one on William Street.

All three stations needed repairs over the course of the past year causing the fluoride disruption.

Currently the Erb Street facilities are the only sites still online.

The lack of fluoride should not have a major impact on dental health, said Nolan.

"The effects of fluoride are measured over months and years," she said. "This won't have a huge impact."

It would be close to impossible to determine whether six months without fluoridation would have an impact on dental health, Nolan said.

But for Vieth, the question now shouldn't be when the fluoridation is getting turned back on, but whether it should be turned on at all.

"We're having a plebiscite on this in (the fall), why not just leave it off?" she said.

Her colleague Coun. Karen Scian, who has been in support of continuing water fluoridation, also had concerns about how the situation was handled.

"There needs to be better communication between levels of government," she said. "But I see this as a temporary problem that will be fixed, and the fluoride will be back in the water."

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