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# Region moves to add fluoride to the ballot

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Regional staff has recommended that a plebiscite on fluoridation be struck in time for the next municipal election, but critics of the practice say it should stop now.

Regional staff investigated whether or not to hold an immediate byelection on fluoridation under the Fluoride Act but decided the cost, at between \$50,000 to \$100,000, and the City of Waterloo's request to put it off until 2010 made more sense.

They also had assurances from public health staff that fluoridated water is safe to drink and, therefore, there is no immediate urgency for a plebiscite.

That, in particular, caused some concern for Robert Fleming of Waterloo Watch and Carole Clinch, the research co-ordinator for People for Safe Drinking Water, who have argued that the debate should be about the most recent science. They said they're still waiting to see the scientific support for the health department's position, and questioned if it is an unbiased participant in the debate.

"With the precautionary principle in mind, it should only take one well conducted study inferring a causal relationship with the cancer-causing properties of fluoridation to shut it down," said Fleming.

That's a serious charge, and he said it's supported by a study done by the Province of Quebec's Ministry of the Environment in 1979. The more than 200-page report talks about a link between fluoridation and cancer, which explains why less than five per cent of the water in Quebec is fluoridated.

He said that municipalities across Ontario have gone against their health department's recommendations and voted to end the practice, most recently in Dryden, Ont., where 87 per cent voted against fluoridation.

"To suggest that public health should continue to be the keepers of the secret instills little confidence," said Fleming. "It should be the end of the tradition of opinion and should be the beginning of the tradition of science, and only science, when it comes to water fluoridation practices."

He though it was interesting to see the region acknowledge that fluoridated water was also reaching into portions of Woolwich Township, including Elmira and St. Jacobs, and small portions of Kitchener, which voted against fluoridation in a plebiscite held around the same time Waterloo started the practice in 1967.

He argues that if the region can't guarantee to keep fluoridated water out of communities that don't want it, it should turn off the taps and stop adding inorganic hydrofluorosilicic acid to the water.

The Waterloo Community Council will meet May 13 to discuss water fluoridation with the head of the public health department, Dr. Liana Nolan, discussing the practice with representatives of Waterloo's neighbourhood associations. Fleming and Clinch will also make a presentation with the floor open for questions after.

Waterloo Watch and the People for Safe Drinking Water are the only ones calling for an immediate stop to water fluoridation.

Waterloo city Coun. Angela Veith also argues that the precautionary principle should be in play and that the region should stop putting fluoride in the water until the public has its chance to vote on the plebiscite.

"I want the tap turned off," said Veith. "And I think we can do it without having a plebiscite."

"To me it's just that simple - we shouldn't be adding toxic chemicals to our drinking water when it does nothing to treat the water. It's totally unnecessary."

She also made a motion at last week's council meeting that asks for the province and Health Canada to keep the city updated on any new developments on fluoridation as the upper levels of government review the practice of adding the inorganic industrial byproduct to drinking water over the next two years.

"This is an issue that is important to me and to many citizens in the City of Waterloo," said Veith. "It's a health issue, and we wanted to make sure that the Ministry of the Environment sees this as important enough to study and that the citizens of Waterloo should be informed of any developments.

"And if the Ministry of the Environment and Health Canada are looking at it perhaps this region and this city should be sitting up and taking a look at this."

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