
Watchdog group's disappointed by lack of information on fluoridation

Bob Vrbanac, Chronicle Staff

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A local group fighting for the end of water fluoridation has filed a municipal Freedom of Information request, but members say they're disappointed with the disclosure provided by local municipalities.

A little more than a year away from a public referendum on the issue, Robert Fleming, representing WaterlooWatch, filed the FOI request with the City of Waterloo and Region of Waterloo May 25.

His group was seeking answers to 19 questions including the science gathered to support continued water fluoridation, the safety of the practice, the total costs of the program and cost-benefit analyses demonstrating that it is reducing dental carries in a cost effective manner and it is a reasonable use of taxpayers dollars.

He was disappointed to receive responses from both levels of government that were thin on details, although the region is asking for more time to compile answers.

"The first urgency with forcing the hand of information to flow is that clearly, if we're going to have a referendum, the public needs that information," said Fleming. "The promise was that we were going to have a made in Waterloo solution, for Waterloo and by Waterloo.

"I observed nothing happening to make that a reality."

He finally got a response from the city last week, which held a plebiscite in 1967 to first allow water fluoridation, and the Region of Waterloo, which administers and monitors hydrofluorosilicic acid as it enters the supply system. The region took over authority on water fluoridation in 2003 after amendments to the Fluoridation Act were enacted.

Fleming assumed that since fluoridation has been persistent in the local municipality for more than 40 years, there would be reams of research compiled by the municipalities.

He asked the local government to demonstrate the science that fluoride causes a reduction in dental carries, that systematic ingestion of artificial fluoride does not pose health harms and that it doesn't have an environmental impact when discharged.

He was hoping that the municipal bodies could demonstrate the causal relationship fluoridation has in reducing cavities and that it is safe for systemic ingestion.

"That's what we were asking for," said Fleming.

The city, on the other hand, is arguing that the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy act does not require institutions to create records in response to requests. Nor, said the city, does the act require institutions to determine if records meet standards imposed by individual requesters.

"We've been asking politely for this information," said Fleming. "Apparently they're very proud of this water fluoridation initiative and have all the answers to all the questions except when you ask them to substantiate those answers.

"We got tired of waiting. We've been fluoridating water in Canada since 1945 ... and they have yet to come back to us and demonstrate the causal benefits of drinking fluoridated water in terms of dental carries."

Fleming is appealing the city's response through Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner, asking for the more than 30 emails public officials sent on the subject of fluoride in the last two years.

Those emails were listed on an index of records provided by the city, but the e-mails themselves were not.

He is also seeking further clarification from the region about the total cost of water fluoridation. The region provided him the chemical costs, but they said specific administration costs cannot be isolated. Fleming said those costs could be in the millions and should be a part of the debate. "We wanted to cut to the chase and asked them to show us what they've got. It never happened."

That why he's continuing to push his five page Freedom of Information request, and Fleming promises not to stop until they get some answers. "We're tired of pussyfooting around," he said

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