



Water activists challenge dental association

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The president of the Ontario Dental Association is defending the use of fluoride in drinking water, despite repeated calls for source science by a Waterloo advocacy group.

Ontario Dental Association President Dr. Ira R. Kirshen has offered to provide the local anti-fluoridation group, WaterlooWatch, the science behind the association's support of water fluoridation, its benefits and its cost-effectiveness.

Kirshen said while the association doesn't have the source science in hand, bodies like Health Canada do.

As recently as 2007, Health Canada reviewed the scientific literature and still came out in support of the benefits, safety and cost-effectiveness of water fluoridation in preventing cavities.

"It just shouldn't be a debate at this point in time," said Kirshen, who took over the presidency of the association in June after eight years on the body's board of directors.

"When you come out and read that the World Health Organization, Health Canada and the Centres for Disease Control in the States are in support — they also have hundreds of studies in support of the science not just one or two."

Robert Fleming of WaterlooWatch wants the association to provide a list of scientific studies, economic analysis and dental carries comparisons that supports those claims.

"The Ontario Dental Association touts the benefits and safety of drinking water fluoridated with hydrofluorosilicic acid, an industrial toxic waste, but yet have failed to produce any science," said Fleming. "They want to say how cost-effective water fluoridation is, yet nobody is really tracking these costs at the municipal level.

"Since the newest president of the Ontario Dental Association, Dr. Kirshen, seems to believe they have the science, I ask they please show us the science."

Fleming made a similar request to the City of Waterloo and Region of Waterloo in a Freedom of Information request filed in May.

He asked them to produce any research they had that supports the practise so that it can be made public in time for a planned plebiscite on the issue being held during the 2010 municipal election. Fleming argues that after 40 years of fluoridation in Waterloo the information should be readily available.

"Where's the source science which proves that swallowing water fluoridated with hydrofluorosilicic acid actually causes any reduction in dental carries?" said Fleming.

"Opinions and endorsements are not science.

"If water fluoridation is to be decided by the people it seems odd that the people don't have the science and the costs to fluoridate so that they can weigh it for themselves."

Kirshen acknowledged that the optimal concentration of fluoride in the water has changed over time.

The most recent change was in 2007, when Health Canada recommended a 0.6 ppm in fluoridate water.

"There are advances in science," said Kirshen.

"We we're seeing some fluorosis, but it's not a disease and is easily controlled. It's not a risk compared to the benefit the people in the lowest socioeconomic levels receive from this."

Kirshen said he's only seen a couple of cases of dental fluorosis , which cause pitting and the discoloration of the teeth, in his 29-year career.

In fact, at his Richmond Hill practice, he's noticed people who were drinking well water compared to fluoridated town often had more dental carries.

As for people concerned about safety of hydrofluorosilicic acid, Kirshen said he admitted he doesn't have all the information about its history as an industrial byproduct. But he doesn't like the scare tactics that are being used in describing it.

"The one thing that really gets to me is that they'll trot out the fluoride that gets transported with the big skull and crossbones on it, and say 'Look what poison you're putting in our water,'" said Kirshen.

"But get a bottle of chlorine that is supposed to be sanitizing and cleansing the water, and it has the same warning. "Nobody ever complains about chlorine in water, and for me scientifically it's way more caustic."

Kirsten said the association will continue its support and made a deputation at Thunder Bay council on the topic Monday night. He said while communities here are debating fluoridation, the number of communities in the U. S. that are fluoridated have gone up by 10 per cent in the last decade.

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