



Word play

Region sets fluoride question

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After weeks of debates and wordsmithing, the Region of Waterloo has decided on a question for this fall's fluoride referendum.

It will read: "Should the Region of Waterloo fluoridate your municipal water? Yes or No."

There was controversy over whether to replace the word "fluoridate" in the question.

Speakers at Tuesday's finance and administration committee said the wording was misleading, since pure fluoride is not actually added to the water.

But the question needed to be set, said Coun. Sean Strickland.

"There is always going to be disagreement attached to a question put on the ballot," Strickland said.

"The important thing is to get the question out there for the public."

A number of delegations requested the region instead indicate that it uses the chemical hydrofluorosilicic acid to add fluoride to the water.

But that would only confuse the issue, said Coun. Jane Mitchell.

"If we put (hydrofluorosilicic acid) in the ballot question, what's stopping us from coming back and say we're going to use another substance to fluoridate that water?" she said. "Are we going to go on forever, or are we going to use (the word) 'fluoridate'?"

Regional councillors ended up voting to use the phrase fluoridate.

"That's what's used in the fluoridation act," said Coun. Sean Strickland.

The region did tweak the wording it originally proposed which asked if the region should "continue to" fluoridate water in Waterloo and parts of Kitchener, Wilmot and Wellesley.

The phrase "continue to" was removed because it could be perceived to bias the question, said regional clerk Kris Fletcher.

Mayor Brenda Halloran also tried to amend the question, by rephrasing it to deal with municipal "drinking" water.

The water that is fluoridated, however, is used for much more than just drinking, Fletcher said.

"Overall, we felt municipal water was a more encompassing term, she said.

Halloran's amendment to insert the word "drinking" was soundly defeated. She was the only one who voted in favour of the proposal.

The question will now need one final approval from regional councillors when they meet again on April 14.

It will then be sent to the provincial government for approval. Once the question is set, the region will bow out of the debate.

It will cost the region \$50,000 to turn the fluoride off and there will be an annual savings of \$36,000 after it is, Fletcher said.

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