

Calls for halt to fluoridation of Peel's water

By Bill Rea

Peel Region's lawyers are going to be reporting, likely in September, on whether the artificial water fluoridation program needs more discussion.

Various groups are pushing to have the program stopped, fearing health concerns.

Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri put forth a motion at last Thursday's council meeting to have the issue re-opened, with a working group set up to look into the matter and report back to council. That motion was deferred until the lawyers could have a look at it. Regional Solicitor Patrick O'Connor told councillors he could probably have a report ready for the Sept. 11 meeting. This was decided after lengthy discussion, along with a presentation delivered by lawyer Nader Hasan, representing Concerned Residents of Peel.

Group chair Liesa Cianchino of Mississauga told councillors they have urgent concerns regarding the safety of what's going into their drinking water. She added it's been assumed for years that fluoridation of water is both safe and efficient, but the group still has serious doubts, and she said that's backed by a growing body of scientific research.

"The public has a right to know and a right to get answers," she declared.

Hasan told councillors there is the potential for legal challenges of the Region's fluoridation program, as well as possible liability. He said there's an argument that the program violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms because the possible benefits are greatly outweighed by the potential for harm. He added it also violates the Ontario Safe Drinking Water Act and the federal Food and Drugs Act.

Hasan argued the benefits of the program "are marginal at best."

"The adverse effects are significant," he added.

The main benefit that's often cited is fluoridation reduces the chances of tooth decay. Hasan said that position was pushed ahead in the 1950s by the dental community, without the evidence being peer-reviewed. He argued advancements in dental care and better diets probably are responsible for the decline in tooth decay. The problem has seen a decline in Europe, where many countries don't have water fluoridation.

He also said supporters of fluoridation have stated it works because it's exposed to the tooth, not because it's swallowed.

Addressing the adverse concerns, Hasan cited a study from 2006 by the National Research Council in the United States that found fluoridation causes dental fluorosis, causing staining. It can also lead damage of the musculoskeletal system, which could result in more bone fractures. Exposing young people to fluoridated water, Hasan added, can lead to cognitive impairment and lower IQs. Also in 2006, a study from the Harvard Dental School found a connection between bone cancer in males and exposure to fluoride as boys.

Hasan stressed this information wasn't available in the 1950s.

He added if these issues could be proven in court, the courts could be obliged to view it as a Charter violation, and the Region could be liable.

People who defend the use of fluoridation argue it's significantly diluted by the time it gets to the drinking water.

"That's small comfort to people," Hasan argued.

"You can't pass the buck," he told councillors, adding they could be held personally liable.

"You don't have to take what I say at face value," he added, commenting there's lots of scientific and dental evidence out there.

He also said there are articles that defend fluoridation which offer little in the way of scientific evidence. He commented that they essentially say, "Trust us, we know better than you."

That presentation was followed by discussion of a number of motions, including one from Caledon Mayor Marolyn Morrison to get the Region's lawyers to report back on this. Sprovieri's motion was also on the floor, along with one from fellow Brampton Councillor Paul Palleschi to defer the matter.

Sprovieri observed there's a lot of support for fluoridation, but not much in the way of evidence from hard studies. Hasan told him he had found no peer-reviewed studies to support the program, adding he had looked.

O'Connor told Mississauga Councillor Jim Tovey he received a copy of Hasan's presentation two days before the meeting, so he hadn't had a chance to go through it in much detail.