

CDC reaffirms support for fluoridation

By Christopher Eshleman, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Friday, March 7, 2008

A dentist and public health specialist from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told Fairbanks officials Thursday that his agency believes supplementing water with fluoride is safe and effective at fighting tooth decay.

The comments come as the Fairbanks City Council reviews the city's 48-year practice of augmenting natural fluoride levels in public drinking water.

"What we have observed is that it's safe, that it's effective and that it's healthy," said the specialist, William Bailey.

Mayor Terry Strle said after the meeting that she supports continued fluoridation.

"I look to them as the authorities on water safety and fluoride," Strle said of the CDC and other agencies that promote pro-fluoride policies. "If they say it's safe and effective, I'm not in a position to dispute that."

Bailey acknowledged disagreement exists in some communities over fluoridation policies. But he pointed to agencies including the CDC, the American Dental Association, the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association that promote or endorse supplementing fluoride in public water to help people across the socio-economic spectrum prevent tooth decay.

Bailey said the CDC bases its recommendation on six decades of cumulative research.

"We know that older adults are keeping their teeth longer than they used to" before community fluoridation policies became popular in the middle of the 20th century, he said.

Councilwoman Vivian Stiver last month proposed ending the practice of increasing fluoride concentrations in Fairbanks' water supplies.

Critics in Fairbanks have noted the fluoride compound added to water here is a byproduct of the phosphate fertilizer industry. Bailey said the compound is the most commonly used fluoride additive in fluoridation programs across the United States.

Stiver asked Bailey whether nursing mothers and young children can safely drink fluoridated water. Bailey said water containing optimal levels of fluoride is safe for everyone, although he acknowledged a 2006 study suggested exposure by children to excessively high concentrations can produce a defect in tooth enamel referred to as "enamel fluorosis."

“For decades people have been mixing (baby) formula with fluoridated water, and children are at no greater risk than they’ve ever been,” he said.