



Seattle Public Utilities FACT SHEET History of Drinking Water Fluoridation

Fluoridation of drinking water has been a consumer issue for many decades, and likely will continue to be in the future.

Fluoridation of Seattle's water supplies began in 1970, as a direct result of the passage of a public referendum in 1968. The purpose of fluoridation is to improve dental health and reduce cavities.

Two earlier efforts to gain approval for fluoridation failed - a 1952 referendum and a 1962 initiative.

Two votes to stop fluoridation were subsequently taken - a 1973 Seattle referendum to remove fluoride and a 1976 statewide referendum to make fluoridation unlawful. Both of these referendums failed. In fact, in each of the votes taken only in Seattle, the percentage of pro-fluoride votes increased, from 34 percent in 1952 to 69 percent in 1973. Thus, Seattle's water sources continue to be fluoridated as a result of public support for fluoridation.

In adding fluoride to the drinking water supplies, Seattle Public Utilities staff provide a dosage recommended by health professionals (1.0 mg/L) and follow operational procedures recommended by water industry professionals. SPU uses the most common form of fluoride for water treatment (hydrofluorosilicic acid). This chemical meets drinking water standards (NSF-60). The cost for fluoridating the water is about 25 cents per person per year for the 1.3 million people in the retail and wholesale service areas.

Based on the public support detailed above, Seattle Public Utilities continues to fluoridate the drinking water. Washington State Department of Health Drinking Water regulations neither require nor prohibit fluoridation. The regulations simply prescribe the range of fluoride level that must be maintained for a system that does provide fluoride treatment. The fluoride level is to be maintained between 0.8 mg/L and 1.3 mg/L.

If a public referendum was passed directing us to stop fluoridating, we would do so. In the meantime, we continue. There has been and continues to be controversy around drinking water fluoridation, but there is also strong public health support for fluoridation:

- 5 Surgeons General, including the current one, Richard Carmona
- Washington State Department of Health http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Oral_Health/education.htm
- Centers for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/benefits.htm>
- US Public Health Service www.usphs.gov
- American Dental Association www.ada.org
- American Medical Association www.ama-assn.org
- Public Health Seattle and King County <http://www.metrokc.gov/HEALTH/oralhealth/index.htm>