WISCONSIN DENTAL HYGIENISTS' ASSOCIATION

To the Madison Water Utility Board

From the Wisconsin Dental Hygienists' Association (WDHA)

Date: October 6, 2014

RE: Support for Water Fluoridation

We understand that the issue of community water fluoridation will be discussed at an upcoming meeting of the Madison Water Utility Board on October 28, 2014. The Wisconsin Dental Hygienists' Association's policy is to support and encourage water fluoridation as a safe, effective and affordable public health measure that significantly reduces tooth decay in people of all ages. Water fluoridation is not the *only* way to reduce tooth decay, *but it is the most cost-effective one*.

Dental hygienists are the prevention specialists on the dental team. Over time, we can tell the difference between patients who live in communities with fluoridated water and those who don't. The difference is especially noticeable in the segments of a population that has lower income and therefore less access to dental care and other forms of prevention. Discontinuing fluoridating the community water supply would deprive the entire population of the health benefits associated with fluoride and thereby actually increasing the risk of tooth decay. The WDHA would consider this a dangerous mistake.

The costs associated with water fluoridation are minimal (approximately $.75 per person per year) compared to the expense of treating tooth decay (a single filling costs $100) and is surely worth it. Public health research repeatedly demonstrates that water fluoridation reduces tooth decay by at least 25% over a lifetime and that for every $1.00 spent on prevention, $38.00 is saved on treatment costs. A study in 2011 showed a total *cost savings* for WI residents insured by Delta Dental state-wide of approximately $6,100,000 per year resulting from community water fluoridation.

Besides being affordable and effective, water fluoridation is *safe*. Three thousand scientific studies over nearly 70 years have shown *no adverse health effects from properly fluoridated water*. In 2014, the CDC advises cities to maintain fluoride at .7 parts per million in their water supplies. Because fluoride in smaller concentrations is found naturally in all water, it is necessary to test the water first and then adjust it to the optimal level for decay prevention.

Along with the WDHA, there are over 100 national or global professional health organizations that recognize the safety, affordability and health benefits of community water fluoridation. These are credible professional associations with an interest in improving the health of individuals and our communities. These associations make decisions based on scientific evidence. Please refer to the American Dental Association's *Fluoride Facts* for thoroughly justified opinions and the complete list of reliable organizations that stand in *support* of fluoridation. (see the link at the end of this letter)

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Opponents of water fluoridation often claim that no randomized, controlled trial study has ever been done of fluoridation. This is an empty argument. Thousands of studies have been conducted on fluoride and fluoridation, and they have collected what is called "observational data" – monitoring the dental health of children and adults over a specific period of time. These studies offer valuable insights that confirm fluoridation's safety and ability to prevent cavities.

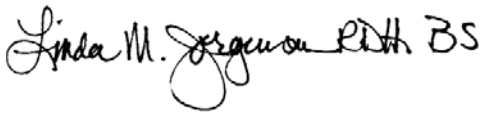
Opponents claim that it isn't right to add fluoride to drinking water without getting an individual's personal consent. This argument ignores some key facts:

- The water supply is a *public* resource. It doesn't belong to individuals – it belongs to all of us. We make these decisions as a community, based on what is best for the health of the whole community.
- Fluoridation isn't adding anything "new" to our water. Fluoride is a mineral that already exists naturally in our drinking water, but not usually at the level needed to help prevent tooth decay.
- Most health programs or services provide the greatest benefit to the wealthiest people because cost is not a concern for them. Fluoridation is one of the few health practices that allow us to reach all residents of our community, from the youngest to the oldest and regardless of their socioeconomic status.
- Iodine is added to table salt; vitamin D is added to milk; folic acid is added to breads and cereals and chlorine is routinely added to water to help prevent bacteria growth to keep people from getting sick. Individuals are never asked for their permission to add these healthy additives.

Nearly a quarter of a million people receive significant decay preventing benefits from your water because you fluoridate it. The WDHA strongly urges you to continue fluoridating the Madison water supply.

Sincerely,

Linda M. Jorgenson, RDH – representing the Wisconsin Dental Hygienists' Association.



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Link to ADA Fluoride Facts:
http://www.ada.org/~/media/ADA/Member%20Center/FIles/fluoridation_facts.ashx