

Commentary  
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### Here's to "Safe & Effective"

In a recent article by Jack Crowther, *Data Shows Tooth Decay Declined Regardless of Fluoridation*, May 5, he commented on dental professionals and the public health community statement regarding fluoridation being "safe and effective, safe and effective". This aforementioned mantra is the one accurate statement in the article. Research by health providers in numerous arenas like the American Dental Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, American Public Health Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Surgeons General and the World Health Organization ironically support Crowther's mantra.

The United States has more than 72 years of extensive experience with community water fluoridation. While there have been numerous charges against the safety of fluoridation, none have stood up to scientific scrutiny. Its remarkable longevity and success is testimony to fluoridation's significance as a public health measure.

But what about effectiveness? Mr. Crowther defends his position by pointing to graphs. Graphs are a great tool to provide a picture, but in this case, the graphs that reportedly show fluoridation is not effective paint an over-simplistic picture of a complex issue. Plotting points on a graph does not tell the whole story. These graphs do not detail the differences between countries that include a wide range of population characteristics and behaviors, health care delivery systems and prevention programs.

Let's look at an example. In Finland, during the periods outlined on the graphs, the country's communities were very similar in terms of ethnic background and social structure. The country had universal health care. Virtually all children and adolescents used government-sponsored, comprehensive, free dental care. The dental programs exposed the Finnish children to intense topical fluoride regimes and dental sealant programs. These conditions are not comparable to those in the United States during the same time period.

One last comment about the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), in the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for the safety of drinking water that comes from the tap. The FDA is responsible for the safety of bottled water. The FDA allows fluoride to be added to bottled water and allows bottled water with optimal levels of fluoride to be labeled: Drinking fluoridated water may reduce the risk of tooth decay.

According Dr. Thomas Opsahl, who practices general dentistry in Rutland City, Vermont, "Water fluoridation is effective and safe, and scientifically grounded in years of research."