

Town of Selmer, Tennessee

Aldermen

John Smith
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Edward Smith

DAVID ROBINSON, Mayor
ANN HENDERSON, Recorder

Neal Burks, Chief of Police
Anthony Carr, Fire Chief
Terry Abernathy, Attorney
Bill Webb, City Judge
Jim Repogle, Building Inspector
Theadies Sebree, Street Dept.
Mike Dickey, Sanitation Dept.

News Release

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Town of Selmer, TN
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Selmer lets facts determine the outcome of fluoridation debate

Despite the majority of members' continuing support for the public policy of water fluoridation, the Town of Selmer's Board of Aldermen unanimously enacted a water additive accountability ordinance that is expected to halt any further use of the fluoridation product that has been the focus of the Board for more than a year.

On June 9, Mayor David Robinson signed into effect an ordinance that establishes criteria for any water additive that is intended to treat humans rather than the water.

While the new ordinance's primary application is certainly focused on products currently used for fluoridation, it does not specify fluoride, as it is intended to apply to any additive to treat humans, especially considering recent public discussions suggesting the benefit of additional lithium, already in some waters, for mood stabilization, and statin drugs for reducing cholesterol.

The ordinance enacted by the Board of Aldermen does not repeal the city's decision to fluoridate. It requires accountability for the safety and effectiveness of the product, transparency and disclosure of the content and impurities of the product, production of specific documents already required by law, as proof of compliance, and conformance with industry standards.

A key element of the ordinance is that the documentation shall be readily accessible to the public.

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"When we began looking at this issue in 2009, our Board was polarized into one segment that solidly supported relying on endorsements from prestigious dental societies and assurances from health agencies that claimed that stopping fluoridation would risk higher rates of tooth decay, and another segment of the Board that believed that when the rubber meets the road, or in this case, when the actual product shows up in the truck, there is going to be harm to some consumers," said Robinson, "And we were stuck there without either side wanting to budge."

"But in March of last year, we made a shift in our approach from supporting one side or another, and began addressing aspects of the issue of using water as conveyance of a substance to treat humans that should be of equal concern for consumers that are in favor of fluoridation as those who oppose it."

The shift was to a process of sequentially challenging various authorities to dig deeper into the factual basis for endorsements and assurances and to provide specific documents.

"I can understand the frustration that individuals in their separate communities must feel, as that without our ability as a responsible party with some authority to go back to the sources of information and say that their answers were not good enough -- that they really didn't answer our very direct questions -- we would still be stuck in our originally-held belief systems," said Robinson. "And frankly, I am not sure that an individual, which I believe deserves an answer to some of these questions as much as we do, without an authority to act on their non-responsiveness, can break through the arrogance we met."

The sequence of events took more than a year, as very specific questions were directed to the chemical supplier, the Tennessee and Hardeman County departments of health, and even the Town's risk management pool that provides liability insurance.

"What kept us going forward on this path," explained Robinson, "was the sometimes outright subterfuge where simple questions were met with doubletalk and derision, with most of our questions that anyone would deem essential to have an answer for, never answered."

An exchange of letters requesting that the chemical supplier make a declaration that their product fulfills the legislative intent of reducing

tooth decay and is safe for infants, children and the elderly, resulted in a non-responsiveness, but amiable decision by the supplier to remove their equipment and all stored fluoridation products.

Despite the advance acknowledgement of the various health agencies' endorsement of the public policy, an exchange of letters requesting detailed answers from the Tennessee and Hardeman County departments of health resulted in a 22-page reply, but only 4 of 45 questions answered directly, as the rest was more statement of endorsement.

"When we sought the documents that a chemical supplier is required to submit to certify their right to sell their product in Tennessee and most other states, detailing the extent of impurities in the product, and when we sought even one toxicological study on the continued use of their product," said Robinson, "we again hit a wall."

The Town of Selmer exchanged letters with the Tennessee Municipal League Risk Management Pool (TML) explaining the Town's inability to extract information on the content and impurities of the product, the refusal of the chemical supplier to provide specific documents required for compliance with law, and evidence that contaminants such as lead and arsenic are admittedly a part of the product. This resulted in TML's lawyerly response that they wouldn't be able to answer with any certainty what liability coverage the Town could count on until TML received a claim.

Not good enough.

"A point that had to be considered," said Robinson, "is that all of these endorsements, and even assurances and guidance from health agencies, doesn't alter the fact that we as the water operator are the only ones that can select and ultimately be responsible for the benefits or harm from consumption of the product.

"So while it might be nice to take potshots from the sideline, or to repeat the assurances from someone who has no accountability, if we are going to take our role as stewards of the water supply seriously, we don't get to substitute endorsements for due diligence."

Bid requests for the hydrofluosilicic acid used for fluoridation, published by Selmer incorporating a simplified version of the new ordinance's criteria, has so far resulted only in notification from some suppliers that they would not be tendering a bid.

"These are all simple criteria that apply due diligence to the claims already made," said Robinson, "so this sets the stage for the facts to declare themselves, which probably should have been the point all along."

"If everything that the promoters of fluoridation have claimed for the public policy is accurate for the substances used for fluoridation, and there is no bait-and-switch, we will see fluoridation back in Selmer again; but, if there have been misrepresentations, these criteria will probably halt the use of other chemicals, just as it has our most current product."

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Attachment: Selmer municipal ordinance #592