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EPA unions call for moratorium on fluoride in drinking water

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EPA unions call for moratorium on fluoride in drinking water

By Mathew Daly
Associated Press Writer

[\(See original article\)](#)

WASHINGTON --Eleven unions representing more than 7,000 workers at the Environmental Protection Agency are calling for a national moratorium on programs to add fluoride to drinking water, citing what they call a possible cancer risk.

In a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, the unions say the agency should act even before a committee of the National Academy of Sciences completes a report on the issue early next year.

J. William Hirzy, an EPA scientist and vice president of the National Treasury Employees Union, Local 280, said Johnson should act now in light of allegations that a Harvard University dentistry professor downplayed research showing an increased risk of bone cancer for boys who drink fluoridated tap water.

Harvard said in June it is investigating the allegations against Chester Douglass, who heads the school's Department of Oral Health Policy and Epidemiology.

Douglass led a seven-year study of fluoride exposure and osteosarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer. The study found that the odds of having osteosarcoma for those who drink fluoridated water were "not statistically different" from those who drank non-fluoridated water.

But Elise Bassin, a doctoral student supervised by Douglass, reported in her 2001 thesis that boys who drink fluoridated water appear to have an increased risk of developing the cancer.

Her findings were based on some of the same people who participated in Douglass' study.

Hirzy, the union leader, said EPA employees "don't think it serves the public or the image of the EPA for us to be sitting on our hands in the face of increased epidemiological risk of sarcoma in young boys."

EPA unions have pressed the agency to limit fluoride since the 1990s.

Eryn Witcher, a spokeswoman for Johnson, said the agency is "committed to protecting human health -- basing our decisions on sound scientific data -- which is why we have requested an independent review, evaluating all of the new data on fluoride, from the National Academy of Sciences, the nation's highest science review panel."

The group's recommendations are expected by February.

The Environmental Working Group, a Washington-based advocacy group, filed an ethics complaint against Douglass in June, citing his position as editor-in-chief of The Colgate Oral Health Report, a quarterly newsletter funded by Colgate-Palmolive Co., which makes fluoridated toothpaste.

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