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Local 2050

Statement of Dr. Robert J. Carton, President, National Federation of Federal Employees, Local 2050, National Press Club

Four years ago, NFFE Local 2050, which represents all 1100 professionals at EPA Headquarters, alerted then Administrator, Lee Thomas, to the fact that the scientific support documents for the fluoride in drinking water standard were fatally flawed. We directed his attention in particular to the mishandling of information on cancer and genetic effects, and asked that the contractor who produced the report defend its conclusions in front of EPA scientists in a seminar. Our request was denied, as were all subsequent requests for reconsideration of the decision to double both the unenforceable recommended safe level of fluoride in drinking water to 4 mg/l and the enforceable maximum contaminant level to 4 mg/l. The fluoride juggernaut proceeded as it apparently had for the last 40 years - without any regard for the facts or concern for public health.

EPA raised the allowable level of fluoride before the results of the rat/mouse study ordered by Congress in 1977 was complete. Today, we find out how irresponsible that decision was. The results reported by NTP and explained today by Dr. Yiamouyiannis are, as he notes, not surprising considering the vast amount of data that caused the animal study to be conducted in the first place. The results are not surprising to NFFE Local 2050 either. Four years ago we realized that the claim that there was no evidence that fluoride could cause genetic effects or cancer could not be supported by the shoddy document thrown together by the EPA contractor.

It was apparent to us that EPA bowed to political pressure without ever having done an in depth, independent analysis, using in-house experts, of the currently existing data that show fluoride causes genetic effects, promotes the growth of cancerous tissue, and is likely to cause cancer in humans. If EPA had done so, it would have been readily apparent - as it was to Congress in 1977 - that there were serious reasons to believe in a cancer threat.

The behavior by EPA in this affair raises questions about the integrity of science at EPA and the role of professional scientists, lawyers and engineers who provide the interpretation of the available data and the judgments necessary to protect the public health and the environment. Are scientists at EPA there to arrange facts to fit preconceived conclusions and violate the ethical norms commonly accepted in the scientific community? Does the Agency have a responsibility to develop world class experts in the risks posed by chemicals we are exposed to every day, or is it permissible for EPA to cynically shop around for contractors who will provide them the "correct" answers?

EPA is now embarked upon a reexamination of the currently existing standard and claims it that it will take into consideration the results of this new cancer study. NFFE Local 2050 is concerned that the reconsideration will continue to ignore the previous literature indicating the possibility of cancer and thereby not put the results of the NTP study in the proper context. NFFE Local 2050 calls upon Mr. Reilly, the EPA Administrator, to appoint a panel of scientists approved by their peers to look at all the available information - on all the health effects produced by fluoride - and produce a first class scientific assessment, correcting the errors of the previous administration.

NFFE Local 2050 also calls upon Mr. Reilly to issue a health advisory recommending that fluoridation cease immediately. The American public should not have to wait for another two years while being exposed against their will to a cancer causing compound while EPA goes through the tedious process of developing a new regulation.