

# **COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION IN AMERICA: THE UNPRINCIPLED OPPOSITION**

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## **THE UNPRINCIPLED OPPOSITION AND THE TECHNIQUES THEY EMPLOY:**

**Bernhardt & Sprague compiled a list of techniques fluorophobics frequently use in an attempt to stop the process of fluoridation. A detailed review of these techniques follows. It will become obvious as the list is reviewed why the author and others often refer to these as the techniques of health terrorism:**

### **1. Neutralizing Politicians:**

- **Once fluoridation legislation has been introduced, fluorophobic extremists attempt to convince state & local legislative officials to remain neutral, rather than make the appropriate health policy decision to fluoridate the water supply.**
- **Antifluoridationists try to convince the legislative officials to refer the issue to public vote rather than to decide the issue through the legislative process. Fluorophobics attempt this because they are much more adept at running a scare campaign focused on the public than they are at convincing skeptical legislators to agree with their views. In those rare instances where fluoridation has been subjected to referendum, only a small percentage of the elections are lost. Moreover, they are not lost because of issues of science, but because of low voter turnout and because of ruthless scare campaigns that are focused on the most emotionally vulnerable citizens.**

- The unprincipled opposition institutes massive letter-writing and phone-calling campaigns designed to fool the legislators into thinking that "everyone is against fluoridation," when in fact the vast majority of citizens desire, accept, and approve fluoridation. The fluorophobics also bombard the print media with many letters-to-the-editors in an attempt to enlist unsuspecting citizens in their cause.
- The antifuoridationists burden legislators with reams of propaganda falsely claiming "evidence of harm," or inappropriately claiming that fluoridation interferes with their "freedom of choice," even though legitimate research results universally refute claims of harm and the courts have repeatedly held that fluoridation interferes with no ones' freedoms. Actually, there are several freedoms with which fluoridation interferes, the freedoms to endure infection, pain, poor nutrition, lost work days, missed school days, higher taxes, higher health care premiums, and uncomfortable dentures.
- Legislators will sometimes let themselves be neutralized because they overestimate the extent of the opposition, incorrectly concluding that it might be better to let the electorate make the decision.
- By arousing serious doubts about safety, antifuoride extremists give local legislative officials an easy excuse to delay favorable action. Thus, not only has the legislative official been neutralized, but the antifuoridationists have gained more time to bombard the public with propaganda designed to turn public opinion against fluoridation.

**2. The second technique used by antifuoridationists is known as The Big Lie:**

- Fluorophobics repeatedly allege that fluoride causes things like cancer, kidney disease, heart disease, genetic damage, osteoporosis, Downs Syndrome, AIDS, nymphomania, and practically every other malady known to man - a veritable laundry list of unproved allegations.

- **These laundry lists are repeated so much in pamphlets, letters-to-the-editor, and phone calls to talk-radio shows, that the public may actually begin to believe the unsubstantiated claims.**
  - **The appearance of an allegation in print (such as in letters to editors) is often believed by the public to be evidence of the allegation's validity. The public incorrectly assumes that the "authorities" (in this case print media editors) would not allow allegations to be printed if they were untrue. Thus, the media often become unwitting pawns of the antifuoridationists, unless the newspapers are large enough and sophisticated enough to have employed qualified and responsible science editors to eliminate from publication those letters that are scientifically unsound and which constitute a potential for harm to the public.**
- 3. The third technique involves the use of Half-Truths, where an out-of-context statement is used to imply a cause-and-effect relationship with some evil result alleged to have been caused by fluoridation:**
- **For example, fluorophobics claim that "Fluoride is poison, so don't let them put it in our water." This statement ignores the principle that toxicity is related to dose of a substance and not to mere exposure to the substance itself. For example, chlorine, Vitamin D, table salt, iodine, antibiotics, even water, serve as excellent examples of substances that are harmful in the wrong amounts but beneficial in the correct amounts.**
  - **Another example is: "Fluoride causes dental fluorosis or mottling." By itself, this claim fails to take into account either the source of the fluoride, the amount of fluoride, the mechanism of fluoride exposure, or the time of exposure as related to the dental age of the person exposed. Community water fluoridation is not responsible for causing dental fluorosis. Limited numbers of the population have an extremely mild form of fluorosis that has been primarily attributed to improper supplementation of fluoride through careless prescriptive practices and the inappropriate ingestion of large amounts of fluoride-containing dentifrice by young children not properly supervised during tooth-brushing.**

Moreover, this mild form of fluorosis is no more a pathological condition than is having blonde hair or blue eyes. Furthermore, adults cannot acquire fluorosis. Antifluoridationists frequently adopt the intellectually dishonest practice of showing photographs of teeth with tetracycline staining or of extremely rare cases of severe dental fluorosis that have occurred in other countries due to extensive industrial pollution or long-term ingestion of extremely high naturally-occurring fluoride levels from non-communal sources. They then falsely claim that this will be the result for anyone, including adults, who drinks fluoridated water.

- "The majority of AIDS victims come from fluoridated cities." Believe it or not, this half-truth was frequently made in the mid-1980's by the most notorious of the antifluoride health terrorists in his misguided attempts to scare San Francisco's public into stopping fluoridation in that city. He continued making this claim, even after the discovery of the virus that causes AIDS. While most AIDS patients coincidentally reside in major metropolitan areas and most major metropolitan areas are fluoridated (44 of the 50 largest cities in the U.S.), the antifluoridationists logic never did explain the high incidence of AIDS in Los Angeles, San Diego, or Newark, New Jersey, all nonfluoridated. This same health terrorist changed the focus of his allegations and claimed during his unsuccessful 1992 campaign for the U. S. presidency, that AIDS is caused by the AIDS drug AZT, implying that there is a plot by medical professionals, drug companies, and the government to infect certain groups with AIDS.

**4. A fourth technique involves utilization of Innuendo:**

- A frequently used fluorophobic tome is, that "While one glass of fluoridated water will not kill anyone, it is the glass after glass of fluoridated water, as with cigarette after cigarette, that takes its toll in human health and life." This technique uses a guilt-by-association ploy, attempting to link the known health risks of cigarette smoking (for which there is substantial scientific evidence) to alleged risks from drinking fluoridated water (of which there is no scientific evidence).

- Another oft-used claim by fluorophobics is that "Insufficient research has been carried out to prove safety, and therefore consumers and government officials are urged to wait until all doubt about safety of fluoridation has been 'scientifically' resolved." This ludicrous argument could be used indefinitely in that it is impossible to ever prove absolute safety for all time for anything. Unqualified acceptance of this argument would mean that literally all technological advancements achieved in the age of science would have to be eliminated. Thousands of studies and untold risk-benefit analyses have shown that fluoridation is safe and effective for the entire population.

**5. A fifth technique involves the Quoting of Inaccurate Statements and the Use of Statements Taken Out of Context:**

- The best way to illustrate this common fluorophobic technique is to refer to two frequently used antifuoridation publications, the Lifesavers Guide to Fluoridation (a pamphlet) and Fluoride: the Aging Factor, (a monograph). Both use essentially the same "scientific references," both are distributed frequently in campaigns opposing fluoridation, and both documents were marketed by their author as "scientific documents." The one-sheet pamphlet claims over 250 references.
- A group of 20 scientists and public health officials from around the United States decided to actually track down the original references in order to evaluate their validity as used by the author. It took two years and the production of a 184-page textbook to adequately document that this pamphlet was a piece of scientific nonsense. The refutation was appropriately entitled "Abuse of the Scientific Literature in an Antifuoridation Pamphlet." What the group found through its Herculean effort was astonishing:
  - Of the 250 references - only 48% were from reputable scientific journals- some of the alleged "scientific studies" were actually references to letters to the editors of newspapers;
  - 240 of the 250 citations were incompletely referenced;

- 21 of the references were incorrectly cited;
- Please note that use of incomplete and/or incorrect citations is a common ploy used by authors who don't want their readers to be able to verify the validity of their claims or their references;
- Amazingly, 116 of the 250 references had no relevance to community water fluoridation whatsoever;
- Many of the references actually supported fluoridation with the works of respected scientists selectively quoted and mis-represented in order to make them appear to discourage the use of fluorides;
- And finally, many of the statements of "hazard" were taken from obscure or hard-to-locate foreign journals. After two-years of effort, the researchers were unsuccessful in confirming that some of the cited journals even ever existed.

## 6. Another technique involves Quoting of Experts:

- Many of the experts to which antifuoride statements are attributed are self-proclaimed experts. Antifuoridationist John Yiamouyiannis frequently introduces himself as the "world's leading expert on fluorides and the biological effects of fluoridation." Only he and a handful of fluorophobics accept his self-proclaimed world leadership in fluoride research.
- Some of the quoted experts have legitimate academic or professional credentials, although not necessarily in disciplines qualifying them to serve as experts in health research specific to fluorides.

- **Antifluoridationists occasionally find a credentialed individual to speak against mainstream science. The statements by these marginalized individuals, while of questionable authority, are often exploited by the fluorophobics. Unfortunately, a most flagrant abuse of the public trust occasionally occurs when a physician or a dentist, for whatever personal reason, uses their professional standing in the community to argue against fluoridation, a clear violation of professional ethics, the principles of science, and community standards of practice.**
- **Some nationally-known figures whom may have opposed fluoridation early in their professional careers prior to the accumulation of overwhelming scientific evidence in its favor, often have their earlier statements quoted despite having changed their position to one of support for fluoridation.**
- **As an example, the fluorophobics repeatedly claim that Nobel Laureate and physician Hugo Theorell "condemns" fluoridation when, in fact, he publicly changed his position to one of support as far back as 1967.**

## **7. The seventh technique involves the Conspiracy Gambit:**

- **Because alleged conspiracies are difficult to disprove, they are a favorite of the health terrorists.**
- **The alleged "conspirators" often include the American Medical Association, the American Dental Association, the equipment and chemical supply companies, the Communist Party, both the aluminum and phosphate fertilizer industries, toothpaste manufacturers, or any other organization appearing to be threatening to the antifluoridationists. Highest on their list of conspirators is the "government" (including the Public Health Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, the prestigious National Institutes of Health, the world-renowned Centers for Disease Control, and the Food & Drug Administration).**

**8. Another technique employs the use of Scare Words:**

- Antifluoridationists frequently play on the current phobias and concerns of the public by describing fluoridation in ecologically-linked or environmentally-loaded terms or phrases such as, "pollutant, toxic waste product, chemical by-product, dumped in the water, or forced down our throats."
- Fluoride is frequently linked by fluorophobics with words like "poison, genetic damage, cancer, AIDS, or artificial," words that certainly conjure up fear by the public when linked to something to which they think they will be unwittingly exposed.

**9. The ninth technique involves the Debate Ploy. The opponents of fluoridation often try to entice unsuspecting media commentators, government officials, or program planners into holding a debate on the "pros and cons" of fluoridation, even though there are no cons to fluoridation.**

- A favorite tactic of the fluorophobics is to argue for a debate so that "the people can decide who is right."
- Proponents of fluoride are then often trapped into consenting to public debates. Jarvis has published an excellent list of a number of reasons for not debating health quacks, a list which is also applicable to that class of health quacks known as antifluoridationists. Jarvis' 5-item list follows:

- (1) The purpose of the debate is to win the audience, not to discover truth. Science is not decided by debating in a public forum, but by careful experimentation, confirmation of findings through independently conducted experiments, submission of all findings to qualified colleagues and peers for critical analysis, and publication of findings in reputable peer-reviewed journals. In a debate, even though the proponents are likely to win the debate, they are just as likely to lose the audience.



- (2) In media circles, there is a saying that "everyone is the same size on TV." In other words, debates give the illusion that a scientific controversy exists when no credible people support the fluorophobic's view. Public debates promote the illusion that there are equal numbers of "scientists" on each side of the issue. The vision of "dueling PhD's or dueling doctors" encourages the public to reject fluoridation until the "experts on both sides can agree."**
- (3) An opponent of fluoridation, utilizing the laundry list approach, can present more misinformation in five minutes than can be refuted in five hours, thus fostering confusion on the part of the public. Proponents are never provided enough time to adequately refute the fluorophobics' charges, because complete refutations, by their nature, take much longer than the sound-bite length antifluoridationists' charges. It was previously mentioned how it took two years' effort and a 184-page textbook to refute allegations made in a one-sheet antifluoridation pamphlet.**
- (4) Public exposure favors the opponents, enabling him or her to gain name recognition for the materials, services, or viewpoint they are promoting. Like parasites, opponents steal undeserved credibility just by sharing the stage with respected scientists who are there to defend fluoridation.**
- (5) It is impossible to compete against opponents without appearing to discredit them personally. When a proponent is arguing against a health terrorist who is spreading misinformation, the proponent cannot separate the anti-science message from the anti-science messenger. Moreover, the debate format often results in the public's sympathy vote for the obvious underdog, the fluorophobics. Also, since fluorophobics are quick to threaten to file lawsuits even when they have no case, this exposes their detractors to legal harassment by the opponent's attorneys. You can be assured though, that while threats to sue honest scientists are frequently made, few suits have actually been filed, and none have been successfully pursued by antifluoridationists.**

Two additional techniques of health terrorists not listed by Bernhardt & Sprague include the Use of Invented Organizations and Subversion of the Media.

(1) The Use of Invented Organizations is most disturbing. After repeatedly being embarrassed for not being able to identify legitimate scientific studies that confirmed any of their many allegations and after having their own poorly-researched propaganda-pieces continually rejected by peer-reviewed journals because the articles were unable to meet rigorous scientific standards, the opponents formed their own pseudo-scientific organizations. Organizations with names like the International Society for Fluoride Research, the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology, or the Preventive Dental Health Association, while sounding impressive to the uninformed, are in reality front organizations for the antifluoridationists with few members, most of those untrained, uncredentialed, and scientifically-unqualified nonprofessionals. Antifluoridationists frequently try to pass off propaganda pieces as "research" in Fluoride, the journal of the International Society for Fluoride Research. While authors of articles appearing in Fluoride claim that the journal is peer reviewed, it is not, and the journal does not meet any of the standard requirements of a scientific journal.

(2) The last technique effectively used by antifluoride extremists is Subversion of the Media. Throughout some antifluoridation campaigns, fluorophobics have been able to win the media to their side for the following reasons:

- Media are more interested in publicizing a controversy (such as a debate) than in accurately representing an issue.
- It is more profitable for the media to do a sensational story on the "dangers" of fluoridation than one on the many scientifically-sound but emotionally unexciting reasons for supporting fluoridation.
- The anti-establishment and anti-science view of fluorophobics is almost always more flamboyant and interesting to a media bent on finding examples of David vs. Goliath or John Q. Public fighting city hall; and
- Scientific rebuttals to flamboyant antifluoridation claims are often, by their nature, dry, unemotional, complex, difficult to explain in lay terms, hard for the public to grasp conceptually, and difficult for the media to interpret and report.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:**

Fortunately, contemporary antifluoridationists' tactics have served more to delay fluoridation rather than stop it, although there are still areas of the country where fluoridation efforts are nonexistent. Unfortunately, antifluoridationists' political efforts significantly increase the costs to society for health care because the delays translate to more dental cavities, more pain, more infection, and higher dental treatment costs. Antifluoridationists' futile efforts also artificially raise costs to taxpayers when: (1) public agencies are forced to repeatedly defend fluoridation to, judges, governors, agency administrators, legislators, and the media (including financing of the tremendous costs of litigation and legislative challenges) and when (2) public agencies are required to spend more to subsidize dental treatment for certain public beneficiaries (e.g., prison inmates, Head Start children, Native Americans, military personnel and their dependents, veterans, senior citizens, the medically indigent, the institutionalized, and others).

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