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ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATION OF CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE
REPORT: EFFECTS OF CHRONIC EXPOSURE TO LOW LEVEL
POLLUTANTS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Opponents of fluoridation have erroneously interpreted a November 1975 report on low-level pollutants that was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) for the House Subcommittee on the Environment and the Atmosphere. In a recent letter to the Division of Dentistry, excerpted below, the Acting Director of the CRS summarized their findings concerning the safety and effectiveness of fluoridation of water supplies as a public health measure.

"In response to your question about listing fluoridation of drinking water supplies under 'sources of pollution in Table I.1 of the Congressional Research Service report "Effects of Chronic Exposure to Low-Level Pollutants in the Environment,"' we can categorically state that such fluoridation has not, to our knowledge, had any adverse effects on man or the environment. Its inclusion on this list of sources of fluorides was solely to indicate that this is an anthropogenic (man-related) activity resulting in fluorides being mobilized in the environment--albeit, at very low levels. ('Pollution' in this report is used as in the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972: 'The term "pollution" means the man-made or man-induced alteration of the chemical, physical, biological, and radiological integrity of water' (section 502 (19))--a definition which does not prejudice "pollution" as harmful.)....

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"Moreover, while the CRS report discusses a host of potential chronic effects--including carcinogenicity, mutagenicity, and teratogenicity--which may result from low-level environmental contaminants, the report was not meant to imply that each of the substances mentioned in the report, or each of the uses mentioned, induce any or all of these effects. To our knowledge, the effects of excessively high levels of fluoride in animals involve the tooth and bone changes called fluorosis; but we know of no evidence that the fluoride ion, at any level, is a carcinogen, mutagen, or teratogen. With respect to fluoridation of drinking water supplies, to our knowledge the only effect is the beneficial reduction in tooth decay.

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"Our report was not intended to identify any single substance or use as posing a particular hazard, but rather to raise the general question of whether Federal policy is capable of handling potential chronic hazards as well as acute ones. Our conclusion, broadly speaking, was that in a number of instances chronic effects of chemicals are adequately handled, but that there are many exceptions. The extent of the literature on fluorides suggests they probably fall into the adequately handled class."

Dental Disease Prevention Activity
Bureau of State Services