

Tell the Truth Persuasively, Persistently and Pervasively

Regaining the Momentum in
Support of Water Fluoridation



The view from the state of Washington

- Washington Dental Service Foundation has engaged in water fluoridation since 1998
- Support local campaigns with grassroots organizing, materials, coalition building, strategy, research, legal
- Counter opposition as they engage with elected officials, Board of Health, the media



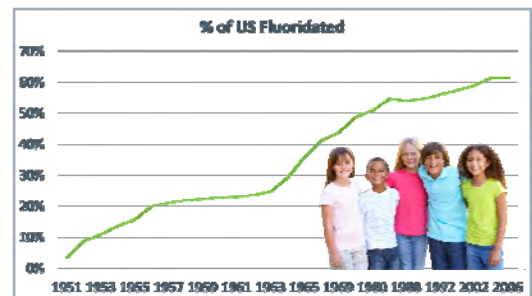
Why water fluoridation?

- Reduces cavities by up to 40% — for both children and adults
- Helps Americans keep their teeth
- Saves millions in treatment costs and eliminates pain and suffering
- Nearly every large city and more than 195 million Americans benefit
- CDC: One of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century



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Wait, didn't we already win this fight?



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... and we still have work to do

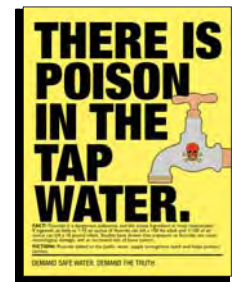
- More than 16 million low-income children go without dental care each year.
- Twice as many Americans lack dental insurance as lack health care insurance.
- The percentage of kids ages 2-5 with cavities increased 15% in the last 10 years.
- The poor suffer the most:
 - 38% of Medicaid kids get dental care while
 - 58% of private insured kids get dental care.

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We've lost the momentum

- Each year, several communities must defend against efforts to end fluoridation.
- In Nebraska, 53 out of 66 towns voted not to fluoridate in 2008 and 2010.
- Tennessee's Speaker of the House publicly urged state officials to stop promoting water fluoridation.
- Elected officials are skittish about raising the issue



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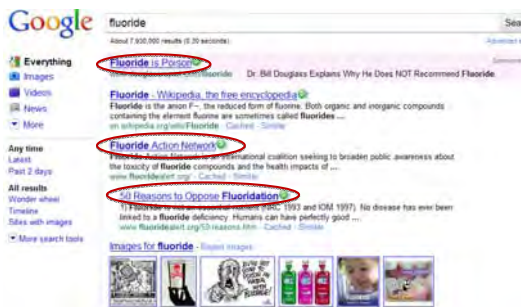
What we know about the opponents



- They are organized, energized and passionate
- They are effective at spinning and distorting the science to spread fear and doubt
- They have a strong presence on the web and in social media
- They capitalize on news events:
 - 2006 NRC Report
 - Infant formula announcement
 - Recent HHS announcement

We're Losing the Web Battle

Search results on Google



Strong use of social media



Does Oprah oppose fluoridation?

Opponents take advantage of open-content websites



Research on Public Attitudes

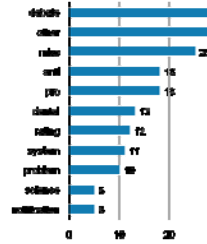
SalterMitchell's research for Pew

- **Mass media analysis**
 - Newspapers (May 2009-May 2010)
 - Social media/search engines
- **Opposition research**
 - Examined five sites with active fluoridation issues
- **Small focus groups** with “active citizens”
 - Palm Beach, FL, Wichita, KS, York, PA
- **National message testing**
 - National survey of 1,503 “active citizens”
 - Tested multiple messages
- **Message testing/survey in Arkansas**



News media scan

(Main themes, May 2009 – May 2010)



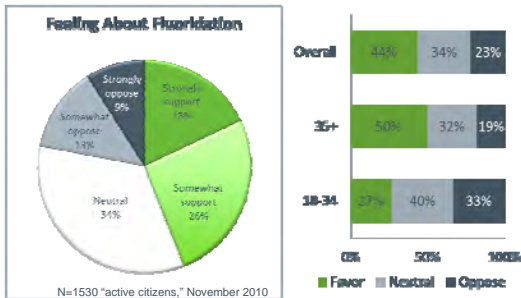
- The main frame of news stories was the “debate” about fluoridation.
- 4 of 5 front-page stories focused on questions over fluoridation safety.
- Toxicity, danger and cancer are constant terms used by opponents

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Support for fluoridation now at 44%

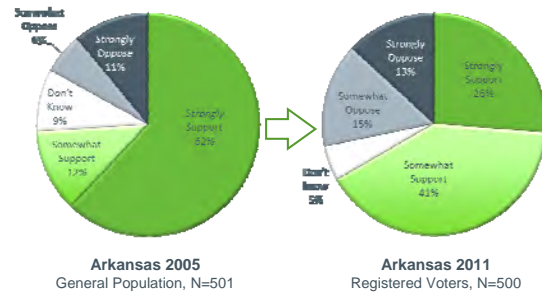
(and younger people are the most likely to oppose)



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Is support for fluoridation softening?



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The public is open to new information

- Over half of all respondents said they are only somewhat informed when it comes to fluoridation issues.

How informed on CWF?	Total Sample (n=1,503)
Very informed	20%
Somewhat informed	54%
Not at all informed	26%

80% not very informed

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Anti –CWF Strategy: Doubt through fear.



Winning 6-10 communities a year.

Strengths

- National network
- Huge web presence
- Book and videos
- 40 years of fighting
- Environmental advocates
- Some science / scientists
- Arguments: Fear / Freedom

Weaknesses

- Association with crazies
- Very little national penetration
- No major health partner

Pro-CWF Strategy: Trust us.



Some 72% of Americans drink fluoridated water.

Strengths

- All the major health and medical organizations
- The science
- Credibility

Weaknesses

- Pathetic web presence
- Dense “scientific” arguments
- Anti-government environment
- No national network
- No full-time people
- Sense of fear/ stealth strategy among advocates

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Distorting what the research says

Rarely do fluoridation advocates challenge these distortions

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Posted by the New York State Coalition Opposed to Fluoridation

Fluoride Linked to Arthritis, Study Shows

Fluoride: A Pain in the Neck - Case Report

FLUORIDE: Yahoo! Contributor Network

Aug 27, 2009 10:01:00 AM EDT

A 52-year-old American (New York) man's arthritic-like joint pain and immobility went away after he stopped brushing his teeth with fluoridated toothpaste, according to a study in the Journal of Bone and Mineral Research.

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The fluoride exposure had nothing to do with fluoridated water or normal brushing. The person in the study swallowed too much toothpaste.

Fluoride (F) was elevated in serum (0.34 and 0.29 mg/liter [reference range: <0.20]), urine (26 mg/liter [reference range: 0.2–1.1 mg/liter]), and iliac crest (1.8%). Tap and bottled water were negative for F. Surreptitious ingestion of toothpaste was the most plausible F source.

The gap in messages and tactics

	Opponents	Advocates
Strategy / Message	Simply seek to create doubt: "When in doubt, take it out"	Uses the language of science. Their theme is not consistent, but mostly it's "trust us"
Network	National leadership and national network tracks fluoride news, shares info and responds rapidly	Local advocates are only beginning to network
Outreach	Aggressively using the web and social media to reach ordinary citizens	A list-serv culture — mostly talk to each other and public health audiences, but not the public
Partnerships	Expanding their base, finding allies in consumer and environmental groups	Almost entirely anchored in public health

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What advocates should do

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Our product isn't fluoride.

Our products are oral health and the truth.

life is better
WITH TEETH
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT
OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Inoculation Track

Begin with our cause: Keeping our teeth

"Be prepared, you are going to hear...."

Show we have thought about these issues

"Whom do you trust?"

Counterattack Track

Create an advocates' network.

Debunk specific arguments with plain English science.

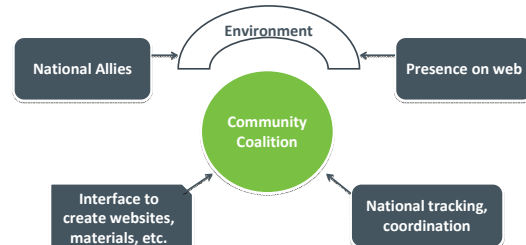
Develop new allies.

What's needed

1. **Create a national network** that supports state and local advocates. A series of trainings or meetings will link this network
2. **Develop "plain English" messages** to explain the science that supports fluoridation and debunk the fear-based arguments of opponents
3. **Support continuing scientific research** on the benefits and safety of fluoridation
4. **Establish a strong web and social media presence** that ensures parents and the public get sound science
5. **Identify non-traditional allies** — consumer groups, parents advocates, civil rights organizations and others

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National effort, but with a local focus



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A robust web presence



National support for local movements, like a miniature Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids



- Tracks emerging issues, coordinates response
- Shares best practices, inspires local action
- Help creating websites, materials, PPTs
- Platform for networking, communication

Resources to support local advocates



A connected site that examines the research related to fluoridation

Customized websites for local advocates



A customized PowerPoint for advocates



Questions?
Comments?