

FLUORIDE: THE VILLAIN AND HOW WE CAN CONQUER IT

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SUMMARY: For more than 15 years, the residents in Dongjane village tried to find out the cause of the mottled teeth which affected them but not the residents of other villages. Once they understood that the mottling came from unsafe drinking water, they started to solve the problem by: 1) asking local health officers to find out more about the unsafe water; 2) informing the residents about the problem; and 3) appointing representatives to go on field studies to other villages in Chiang Mai province who also faced the same problem. The representatives returned with information which was presented at a village meeting where the villagers decided on how to solve their problem in accordance with their situation and available resources. Their plan was to first change their drinking water source from the unsafe piped water to rain water and to then try to find a new raw water source for their piped water system. Immediately after taking their decision they began action to: 1) collect funds for a rainwater collection system including a water storage tank; and 2) provide information to the community at large and the policy makers regarding the adverse health effect of dental fluorosis caused by the unsafe water with a high fluoride (F) level. Four years later, a new water supply for Dongjane village was found with a supply provided by Rural Pipe Waterworks. Now, 14 years later, no new cases of severe dental fluorosis are occurring in Dongjane village and no unsafe water with high F levels is present in the piped water system. The solving of the problem of dental fluorosis in Dongjane village, in a sustainable manner, was the result of an integrated effort, from both the community and the government.

Key words: Community action; Dental fluorosis; Dongjane village; Fluorosis; Integrated effort.

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