

Feds' fluoride foe makes a big splash

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Dr. William Marcus was fired two years ago for opposing his agency's conclusions that fluoridated drinking water is safe.

But in a surprise twist that should warm the hearts of disgruntled employees everywhere, Marcus was returned triumphantly to his old job at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last week by order of U.S. Sec-

retary of Labor Robert Reich.

In a precedent-setting decision, Reich's Labor Department found that the EPA falsified employment records and fabricated negative stories about the 52-year-old scientist after he wrote a memo that fluoridated water — like New York City's — increases the risk of cancer.

At the time, Marcus was senior toxicologist at the EPA's Office of Drinking Water.

After warning his superiors of the dangers of fluoride, Marcus was accused by the agency of taking his concerns to the press and public.

Marcus argued that he should have been protected under federal whistleblower laws.

Reich's landmark decision apparently expands the rights of thousands of whistleblower employees across the nation, legal experts said.

Stephen Kohn, chairman of the National Whistleblower Center and Marcus' attorney, said the ruling for the first time protects government whistleblowers from retaliation by bosses who want to cover up instances of illegal toxic dumping, pollution or other environmental hazards.

"I have finally been vindicated — but all of us are at risk," Marcus said.

Reich also ordered the EPA to reimburse Marcus for two years of back pay at \$90,000 per year, and \$50,000 for emotional distress — the largest such payment ever awarded to a federal environmental employee.

The Labor Department decision does not address whether fluoridated water is safe.