

Dean Burk

Dean Burk was a [chemist](#) who worked for many years at the National Cancer Institute. Anti-fluoride activists are fond of [citing](#) this quote from Burk: “More people have died in the last 30 years from cancer connected with fluoridation than all the military deaths in the entire history of the United States.” But this claim is not supported by valid science.



Burk collaborated with John Yiamouyiannis, another chemist, to collect and circulate data backing their claim that fluoridated water raised the incidence of cancer. But a 1985 [report](#) by the British Working Party on Fluoridation (BWPF) found the Burk-Yiamouyiannis contention to be “defective” and noted that their analytical techniques “displayed errors and questionable procedures.” The BWPF concluded that there was no cancer-fluoridation link.

Burk was a distinguished individual who, unfortunately, sometimes took public positions that were not scientifically defensible. His claims about fluoridation were one example. Another example is Burk’s promotion of Laetrile as a treatment for cancer. Laetrile—also called amygdalin—is a drug [manufactured](#) from apricot pits or the seeds of similar fruits. In a 1970 [letter](#) to

Science News, Burk endorsed the view that Laetrile “deserves a try.” In 1978, the commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration [called](#) Laetrile a “genuine public health menace” because it could encourage people living with cancer to stop or delay effective treatments and, instead, use Laetrile—a drug that “can be hazardous.” A [clinical trial](#) confirmed the commissioner’s concerns. The American Cancer Society’s website [reports](#):

Available scientific evidence does not support claims that Laetrile or amygdalin is effective in treating cancer or any other disease. Both contain a small amount of a substance that can be converted to cyanide in the body, and several cases of cyanide poisoning have been linked to the use of Laetrile.

Burk [retired](#) from the National Cancer Institute in 1974. He died in 1988 at the age of 84.