

November 6, 2008

## A Proposed Environmental Reporting, Disclosure and Innovation Program for the City of Toronto

### Background

The Medical Officer of Health will recommend to the Board of Health at its November 17, 2008 meeting that the Board and City Council adopt an Environmental Reporting, Disclosure and Innovation program. The program includes a new bylaw, phased in over four years that would require affected facilities to annually report to the City if they use or release any of 25 priority substances above specified thresholds. Toronto Public Health (TPH) will work in partnership with Economic Development, Culture and Tourism and other City divisions to help businesses comply with the bylaw and identify ways to make environmental improvements. The data collected would be made publicly accessible through a searchable internet site.

Sometimes referred to as “community right-to-know,” these types of programs have been successful in reducing hazardous chemicals by stimulating pollution prevention.

This program has been three years in the making. TPH has identified 25 priority substances in our local environment at levels that are of health concern. These substances are commonly used or released by industrial, commercial and institutional facilities. TPH also reviewed approaches used across North America to reduce these substances, and consulted extensively with businesses, residents and community organizations. The proposal benefits from the diverse feedback received and is a made-in-Toronto program that continues the City’s history of environmental leadership.

### Why is an Environmental Reporting, Disclosure and Innovation Program needed?

Existing reporting regulations and environmental assistance programs focus mainly on large businesses. In an urban centre like Toronto, there is very little information available on the toxic chemicals commonly used by many small and medium-sized facilities. Toxic substances can be measured in our air, but we do not know which facilities are using them or how much they are releasing into the local environment. This program will collect this information, and enable the City to support businesses to identify pollution prevention opportunities.

### How could a reporting bylaw improve Toronto’s environment?

Research on similar programs demonstrates that when companies are required to track and report toxics use and emissions, they start to find ways to reduce chemical use.

For example, the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) has been credited with lowering emissions by 27 per cent since it began in 1993. In the United States, emissions reporting to the Toxics Release Inventory have decreased by 46 per cent between 1988 and 1999. The Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Act enabled that state to meet its goal of reducing toxic waste generation by 50 per cent in just 10 years.

## **How is public health at risk from these 25 substances in the air?**

The Medical Officer of Health is concerned about the long-term, combined health risk from thousands of facilities in Toronto using and releasing these substances, often within or close to residential neighbourhoods. The most common way people are exposed is through the air, and most of the priority substances are present in our air at levels that are of concern to health.

## **How could a reporting bylaw benefit business in Toronto?**

We recognize that companies will need to dedicate some staff time to meet new reporting obligations. Experience with similar programs indicates that there are also benefits to reporting. Tracking and reporting chemical use can help stimulate businesses to adopt pollution prevention programs. The benefits to business can include:

- Improved ability to respond to consumer demands for greener options
- Reduced costs associated with regulatory compliance and hazardous waste management and liability
- Lower operating costs from reduced use of chemicals and energy
- Improved worker health and safety, and
- Enhanced community relations.

## **How will the proposed program minimize burden on businesses?**

The Environmental Reporting, Disclosure and Innovation Program has two components: mandatory reporting on priority substances and support for implementation of pollution prevention measures. The mandatory reporting program is designed to have minimal burden on businesses, and the pollution prevention program is designed to benefit businesses.

Environmental reporting may be new to many businesses, so the program will be phased in gradually over a four-year period. Furthermore, the program will provide free training, information and online 'calculators', which allow businesses to estimate use and emissions by entering basic information such as how much chemical they purchased in a year and the equipment they use.

The city will provide free training, technical assistance, information about financial incentives and other supports to enable businesses to identify a range of cost-effective solutions. The voluntary pollution prevention program can help small businesses reduce costs such as through reduced chemical and energy use. Other areas where costs can be reduced include health and safety protection, liability, risk management and waste disposal.

## **Does the program overlap with existing federal and provincial reporting programs?**

This new program does not overlap with existing programs. It fills important gaps in the reporting and disclosure of information, and would support environmental innovation for small and medium-sized Toronto businesses. Current reporting programs like the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) and Ontario's proposed Toxics Reduction Strategy focus on only large businesses. This leaves out the majority of Toronto businesses, which are small and medium sized. TPH will continue to work closely with the federal and provincial governments to ensure the new program, if adopted, continues to align with existing initiatives.

## **What are the 25 substances of priority health concern?**

The following chemicals or byproducts of industrial processes would be reportable: Acetaldehyde, Acrolein, Benzene, 1,3-Butadiene, Cadmium, Carbon tetrachloride, Chromium (Hexavalent and Non-hexavalent), Chloroform (Trichloromethane), 1,2-Dibromo ethane (Ethylene dibromide), 1,4-Dichlorobenzene, 1,2-Dichloroethane (Ethylene dichloride), Dichloromethane (Methylene chloride), Formaldehyde, Lead, Manganese, Mercury, Nickel, Nitrogen Oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), Tetrachloroethylene (Perchloroethylene), Trichloroethylene, Vinyl chloride, and Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs).

## **Where are these substances used?**

These substances may be used or released in a variety of operations, including chemical manufacturing, food and beverage production, automotive repair and laboratories. For example, trichloroethylene and dichloromethane are common cleaning solvents that may be used in sectors such as manufacturing, chemicals distribution and food and beverage production.

## **What is the timeline for reporting?**

The reporting bylaw would come into effect on January 1, 2010. Reporting would be phased in over four years, with the facilities in the first phase required to report 2010 data by June 30, 2011.

## **Under the proposed new bylaw, will the public be able to access the information that facilities report?**

With the exception of some information protected under privacy laws, the public will be able to access the data collected through a searchable website. This is currently done with programs like the National Pollutant Release Inventory. The public will be able to search by facility, chemical or neighbourhood, and see the information in maps and tables. They could also see health and environmental information about the substances, and view statements from facilities about environmental programs. This database will be available to the public by January 2012.

## **How would the public benefit from access to this information?**

Providing transparent, easy-to-understand information will increase residents' knowledge and awareness of their local environment and the businesses in their neighbourhoods. Access to this data could also help build support for environmental improvements. Residents would be able to:

- have the information they need to participate in discussions with facilities about why chemicals are used, and encourage the facility to adopt pollution prevention measures; and
- support local facilities that are making environmental improvements.

Additional information is available at [www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/enviro\\_info.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/enviro_info.htm).

**Media contact: Rishma Govani, Media Relations Coordinator, Toronto Public Health  
416-338-7974 or [rgovani@toronto.ca](mailto:rgovani@toronto.ca)**

