

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

August 28, 2006

To: Board of Health
From: Dr. David McKeown, Medical Officer of Health
Subject: Progress Report on Access to Environmental Information

Purpose:

To provide an update on work to date to increase access to environmental information in Toronto.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial impacts stemming directly from this report. Any financial implications of actions resulting from this report will be considered through the operating budget process of relevant divisions.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Background:

At its June 19, 2006 meeting, the Board of Health adopted recommendations regarding access to environmental information in Toronto. At this meeting, the Board requested the Medical Officer of Health to provide an update at the September 2006 Board of Health meeting on progress to expand the City's online "environmental portal", to undertake a pilot project in a City facility, and on principles to guide the City's work to increase access to environmental information.

This report is in response to that request.

Comments:

At its June 19, 2006 meeting, the Board of Health considered a report by the Medical Officer of Health entitled "Access to Environmental Information: Preventing Pollution, Avoiding Risks". The report provided a preliminary assessment of the current state of environmental data

collection and public access to that information in Toronto, and made recommendations for additional consultation and future implementation of strategies to increase municipal and public access to such information. The Board amended the recommendations to further identify specific activities, including the expansion of the City's online "environmental portal" and a Community Right-to-Know pilot project at a City facility, to be undertaken in the development of future strategies.

Toronto Public Health (TPH) has begun discussions with staff in appropriate divisions, including Corporate Communications, Web Services, Environmental Services, the City Clerk's Office and Legal Services regarding these recommendations. TPH has convened interdivisional working groups where appropriate to proceed with this work.

Environmental Portal:

The City's Environmental Portal (www.toronto.ca/environment) currently provides information on issues such as waste diversion, pesticide reduction and water efficiency, as well as City policies and programs like the Roundtable on the Environment and the Green Toronto Awards. Web Services began in September 2005 to explore improvements to the City's online pages, including the environment portal. TPH will assist Web Services with a preliminary analysis of environment-related material on the City's web site, including material not currently linked on the environment portal page, to consider opportunities to expand the information.

The Board specifically recommended that information such as sewer-use by-law and pesticide by-law non-compliance incidences and notices on Environmental Assessments be included in the expanded environmental portal. TPH staff has begun preliminary discussions with Legal Services and appropriate divisions and will report in 2007 on progress as part of the overall website expansion work.

Pilot Project:

It was recommended that a Community-Right-To-Know pilot project be undertaken at a City facility that uses 'priority' toxic substances. The pilot project would track toxic substance use and discharge through a 'materials account balance' method, develop and implement a pollution prevention plan, and report tracking and pollution prevention plans and activities to the public. The 'priority' toxic substances referred to were described by the Board as toxic chemicals that contribute to one or more of the following: occupational and environmental cancer; poor air quality in Toronto; damage to children's health; and prevalence of Persistent Organic Pollutants in our environment.

In consultation with Environmental Services and the City Clerk's Office, the pilot program will take place at the Printing and Distribution Unit (PDU) in Records and Information Management Unit of the City Clerk's Office at 90 Niagara Street. The PDU provides printing layout and set-up, print production, print finishing services (binding, sorting) and brokerage of external print jobs. Its 24 staff handle approximately 6,700 print jobs annually. In recent years, the City Clerk's Office has implemented tracking and reporting protocols and enhanced health and safety

programs to address the use of substances such as organic solvents and inks. This pilot study offers opportunities for further analysis and continuous improvement.

As a pilot facility, the PDU provides the opportunity to review the processes that were undertaken in the past to track and substitute hazardous substances, which may inform onsite improvements and how they can be implemented in other City facilities. It is also anticipated that the pilot may identify approaches to pollution prevention that can also be implemented in other commercial facilities in Toronto. TPH will convene a Project Team of interdivisional staff to develop and evaluate the pilot study.

Guiding Principles:

The Board of Health also endorsed principles to guide consideration of how to enhance access to environmental information in Toronto. The principles include the provision of consistent and timely information on toxic chemicals used, stored and released in Toronto, supporting environmentally-sustainable business practices and focusing on certain priority toxic substances. These principles will guide upcoming consultation with stakeholders in the business community, labour groups, environmental and health organizations, community groups and City staff. TPH has drafted a Request for Proposals to retain an external consultant to design and coordinate the consultation, which is planned to commence in the Fall of 2006. The guiding principles endorsed by the Board of Health have been incorporated into the Request for Proposals.

Conclusions:

The Medical Officer of Health is currently assessing the environmental information held by the City to identify opportunities to increase interdivisional sharing as well as public access, and will consult further with the business sector and community stakeholders on ways to similarly improve data collection and access.

Results of these initiatives will be reported to the Board of Health in early 2007.

Contact:

Susan Makin
Interim Director, Planning and Policy
Toronto Public Health
Tel: 416-392-7463
Fax: 416-392-0713
Email: smakin@toronto.ca

Dr. David McKeown
Medical Officer of Health