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Toronto Public Health recommends program to reduce pollution and stimulate a greener economy

Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, today proposed a program to reduce the use of hazardous substances by city operations, institutions, commercial and industrial facilities.

The Environmental Reporting, Disclosure and Innovation Program will be presented at the next Board of Health meeting on November 17. The program includes a bylaw, which, if implemented, will require businesses and City operations to publicly report their use and release of 25 hazardous chemicals that are in Toronto's environment at levels of health concern.

This data would be made available on a searchable internet site for residents seeking information on their communities. Another significant part of the program is aimed at supporting businesses to reduce their use of hazardous chemicals through more efficient equipment and processes, alternative chemicals, and recycling rather than disposal.

"If this program is adopted, our city will be a healthier place to live, and businesses will be stimulated to become leaders in a greener economy as they look for innovative ways to reduce the use and release of harmful chemicals," said Dr. McKeown. "Residents will also benefit – they will have access to the information they've been requesting about the environment in their neighbourhoods."

Although a federal registry currently collects data on hazardous substances used by Canadian companies, only large companies that use 10,000 kg. of designated substances are required to report. This means that the vast majority of smaller and medium sized facilities in Toronto are exempt. Under the proposed made-for-Toronto bylaw, between 5,000 and 7,000 facilities would be required to report.

Although use or emissions of chemicals from smaller businesses may be modest or occur within existing standards, the long-term cumulative exposure to chemicals from many facilities in close proximity to where people live creates concern for health.

"We know from looking at similar programs that once companies are required to track and report toxics use and emissions, there is a measurable reduction in the use of toxic substances," said Dr. McKeown.

If the Board of Health and City Council approve the program, the reporting bylaw would come into effect on January 1, 2010. Reporting would be phased in over four years to give facilities time to learn about the program and how to report.

The report and background information on the program are available at: www.toronto.ca/health.

Toronto is Canada's largest city and sixth largest government, and home to a diverse population of about 2.6 million people. It is the economic engine of Canada and one of the greenest and most creative cities in North America. In the past three years, Toronto has won numerous awards for quality, innovation and efficiency in delivering public services. Toronto's government is dedicated to prosperity, opportunity and liveability for all its residents.

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