

January 17, 2005

Pesticide By-law - action thresholds

On April 1, 2004, City Council passed the Pesticide By-law restricting the use of pesticides on public and private property. Enforcement of the By-law is being phased in to give residents and businesses time to adjust and to learn about natural lawn and garden care.

Today's staff report addresses a variety of matters raised by Council in May 2004. Council requested the Medical Officer of Health to report back on a number of issues, most notably action thresholds for common pests, and on criteria for adding pesticides to the exempted products list in the By-law.

- The Pesticide By-law defines “infestation” as “the presence of pests in numbers or under conditions which involve an immediate or potential risk of substantial loss or damage.”
- “Action threshold” is the point at which pests are present in numbers or under conditions which result in an immediate or potential risk of substantial loss or damage. These thresholds are not part of the By-law, but provide direction to Toronto Public Health (TPH) to ensure compliance with it.
- To develop action thresholds, TPH consulted the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Toronto Parks and Recreation and other jurisdictions.
- Residents will be informed of the action thresholds through public education and by public health inspectors. TPH treats every inspection as an opportunity to provide residents and plant care professionals with information about healthy lawn care.
- To help residents and plant care professionals prevent substantial damage to lawns, action thresholds have been developed for two common pests known as grubs and chinch bugs. Unlike dandelions and other weeds, grubs and chinch bugs have the potential to completely destroy a lawn.
- Golf courses, lawn bowling greens, hydro and transportation corridors are at increased risk of damaging infestations where pesticide use may be necessary. These properties will be subject to pro-active inspections to ensure pesticide use is warranted and kept to a minimum.
- Properties managed by Toronto Parks and Recreation – turf (including general parkland, sports fields, destination parks, golf course and bowling greens), horticultural areas, hard surfaces and natural areas are also subject to pro-active inspections to ensure minimal pesticide use.
- In all cases, there are provisions in the By-law to permit use of pesticides as a last resort if there is a threat of substantial loss or damage to the turf.
- To ensure the public has many lower-risk pesticide choices, the By-law will accommodate new lower-risk products by recognizing the “biological pesticide” designation used by the U.S. EPA and Health Canada. The By-law will reflect scientific innovation and ensure that lower-risk pesticides can be added to the exempted pesticide list without duplicating federal and provincial approvals.

Compliance with the By-law is best achieved using plant health care (PHC) methods. A PHC approach includes: aeration, top dressing, overseeding, proper watering and mowing to keep lawns healthy and to resist weeds, disease and infestation.