



TORONTO STAFF REPORT

March 19, 2002

To: Board of Health
From: Dr. Sheela V. Basrur, Medical Officer of Health
Subject: Response to Board of Health on Various Pesticides-related Inquiries

Purpose:

To respond to Board of Health inquiries regarding a) pesticide use on the properties of three Toronto School Boards, b) the impact of smog alert days on work schedules during the grass cutting season, c) the use of wildflowers and sea-grasses on boulevards as alternatives to pesticide use d) to pursue some form of organic lawn care treatment for City properties and e) provide an update from the provincial Minister of the Environment on Ontario's assessment of the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling on the Town of Hudson's pesticide use by-law.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

At its meeting on July 16th, 2001, the Board of Health considered the report from the Medical Officer of Health regarding a strategy to achieve a phase out of non-essential outdoor uses of pesticides. The Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to report back on:

- (1) what the Toronto Catholic District School Board, French Public and French Separate School Boards are doing with respect to pesticide use on their properties;

- (2) the number of smog alert days in 2001 during the grass-cutting season and its impact on work schedules;
- (3) the use of wildflowers and sea-grasses on boulevards as alternatives to pesticide use;
- (4) how the City could pursue some form of organic treatment as used by private organic companies; and
- (5) on the Provincial Minister of the Environment's assessment of the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling on the Town of Hudson's pesticide use by-law.

This report responds to these requests and has been prepared in consultation with Economic Development, Culture & Tourism.

Comments:

Pesticide Use on the Properties of Toronto School Boards:

The Board of Health inquired about the policy of Toronto boards for Catholic, French public and French Catholic schools.

Le Conseil scolaire public de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest (French public) has a specific policy that prohibits the use of pesticides or herbicides on their properties. This policy is applied to the external tendering process by prohibiting any external contractor from using pesticides or herbicides.

The Conseil scolaire de district catholiques Centre-Sud (French separate) does not have a stated pesticide use policy. However, neither pesticides nor herbicides are used on school properties. Custodial staff are not permitted to purchase pesticides and the board has prohibited pesticide use by external contractors. The only exceptions are the use of pesticides on an as needed basis to control bee or wasp hives and rodents.

The Toronto District School Board has confirmed its policy to not use pesticides/herbicides on any of its properties.

At the time of writing this report, the information from the Toronto Catholic District School Board was not available.

Impact of Smog Alert Days on Grass Cutting Schedules:

There were 20 smog alert days last summer (2001). Normal operational procedures were altered for city staff in Parks and Recreation and Works and Emergency Services. Typically, litter is picked up prior to cutting the grass. On smog alert days, staff were redeployed to undertake litter pick-up on the sites which were scheduled next for grass cutting. As soon as a smog alert was

lifted, mowing resumed. As well, the schedule was amended to reflect the reduced grass growth due to excessive heat experienced on smog alert days and generally throughout the summer of 2001. The revised approach maintained operational efficiency which was confirmed by the minimal number of complaints received.

The Use of Wildflowers and Sea-Grasses on Boulevards as Pesticide Alternatives:

Alternative plants reduce the amount of turf grass and the associated use of pesticides on boulevards, however, they generate other concerns. Tall plants block sight lines and litter is trapped in boulevards by taller grasses and plants. Works & Emergency Services supports naturalization of sloped boulevards and naturalization along city thoroughfares, bridge abutments and gateways to the City where it is safe and feasible. However, expansion of the naturalisation program would require additional funding.

Organic Lawn Care for City Properties:

Currently, Economic Development, Culture & Tourism is working with the Organic Landscape Alliance to document an organic lawn care program. Formalized training for staff and the landscape industry is being considered.

Provincial Assessment of the Supreme Court Decision:

At present, the government of Ontario is examining the Supreme Court decision and its impact on pesticide management in the province. Should the Ministry of the Environment decide to pursue a regulatory change with respect to municipal powers to restrict pesticide use, full consultation with all stakeholders will take place and the proposed changes will be posted on the Environmental Registry.

Conclusions:

Two of the school boards surveyed, French Public and Catholic, do not use pesticides or herbicides except for control of bees, wasps or rodents. The external tendering process for both boards include specific clauses that prohibit external contractors from using pesticides and herbicides on school property.

Economic Development, Culture & Tourism reports that smog alerts do affect grass-cutting schedules of both Parks and Recreation and Works and Emergency Services. Work adjustments are made to accommodate lawn mowing prohibitions on smog alert days and operational efficiency is maintained.

Alternatives to turf grass are used, where feasible and safe, on boulevards and other City sites. Naturalisation of boulevards raises other concerns and additional funding would be required to expand the program.

An organic lawn care program is currently being documented including formalizing training for City staff and the landscape industry.

As of February 2002, the Government of Ontario continues to examine the Supreme Court decision. The Minister of the Environment has indicated that all stakeholders will be consulted should it decide to pursue a regulatory change with respect to municipal powers to restrict pesticide use.

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List of Attachments:

- (1) Letter from Le Conseil scolaire public de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest
- (2) Letter from The Conseil scolaire de district catholiques Centre-Sud
- (3) Letter from Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, Parks and Recreation
- (4) Letter from Provincial Minister of the Environment