



TORONTO STAFF REPORT

March 21, 2002

To: Board of Health

From: Dr. Sheela V. Basrur, Medical Officer of Health

Subject: Strategy to Achieve a Phase-out of Non-essential Outdoor Use of Pesticides

Purpose:

To provide an update on activities related to the development of a strategy to reduce non-essential outdoor pesticide use on private property for the City of Toronto.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications stemming directly from this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the Board of Health forward this report and all attached documents to the Works Committee; the Economic Development and Parks Committee; the Planning and Transportation Committee; the Pesticide Reference Group and the Toronto Interdepartmental Environment (TIE) Pesticides Subcommittee for their information;
- (2) the Medical Officer of Health report back to the Board of Health and City Council on the outcome of the public consultation process; and
- (3) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting on July 16, 2001, the Toronto Board of Health considered a report from the Medical Officer of Health regarding the capacity of a municipality to regulate the non-essential outdoor use of pesticides. The Board of Health recommended the development of a strategy to phase out non-essential outdoor uses of pesticides on public and private property in the City of Toronto. The Board also directed the Medical Officer of Health to prepare a public discussion document and seek broad input on the nature and scope of a potential pesticides by-law.

City Council at its meeting on November 6, 2001 endorsed the preparation of the discussion document and the recommendation that the Medical Officer of Health seek input about a potential by-law. Council also recommended the establishment of a Reference Group comprised of interested Board of Health members, Councillors, representatives from Economic Development, Culture and Tourism and Works and Emergency Services. The Medical Officer of Health is charged with seeking broad input on the nature and scope of a potential pesticides by-law and is being assisted by the TIE Pesticides Sub-committee and the Reference Group. It is anticipated that the Reference Group will provide input on the public consultation process and will participate in the public meetings. In addition, the Reference Group will provide advice to the TIE Pesticides Sub-committee on the findings from the consultations.

This report provides an update on the discussion document, its supporting documents, the process to date in seeking public input on a potential pesticides by-law and next steps in the public consultation process.

Comments:

Discussion Document and Technical Reports:

Toronto Public Health has prepared a discussion document, "Playing it Safe: Healthy Choices about Lawn Care Pesticides" (Attachment 1), to inform the public and aid in their consideration of options to reduce pesticide use, including a possible by-law. The report summarizes information about:

- (a) public attitudes about and alternative approaches to lawn care;
- (b) currently available research on pesticides and their effects on health and the environment;
- (c) basic law and policy context for considering possible municipal controls on pesticide use on private property.

"Playing it Safe" summarizes Canadian information on public attitudes to pesticides and their use outdoors. It includes a summary of a telephone survey commissioned by Toronto Public Health, in consultation with the Pesticides Subcommittee of the Toronto Interdepartmental Environment Team (TIE). The survey was conducted between December 2000 and February 2001, and asked the public about their awareness, perceptions, uses, and attitudes towards lawn pesticides. The report, "A Survey of Toronto Residents' Awareness, Uses and Attitudes Towards Lawn Pesticides" (Attachment 3) provides the key findings of this research. It indicates that

Toronto residents value lawns that are pest-free and at the same time acknowledge the potential health risks associated with the use of pesticides. About 45 percent of homeowners had treated their lawn with chemical pesticides, with only 13% hiring the services of a professional lawn care company to do so. About two-thirds (66%) of the Toronto survey respondents supported restricting the use of lawn and garden pesticides.

The discussion document also provides an overview of the evidence regarding exposure and potential for health effects from residential uses of pesticides. In view of the complex and evolving nature of the science, it was deemed necessary to update an earlier report released by Toronto Public Health, "Pesticides: A Public Health Perspective (October 30, 1998). The new report, "Pesticides: A Review of Human Exposure & Health Effects Research" (Toronto Public Health, 2002) (Attachment 2) updates the scientific knowledge regarding exposure and potential for health effects from residential uses of pesticides.

"Playing it Safe" also describes the legal and policy context for considering municipal controls on pesticide use on private property. It outlines possible strategies to reduce pesticide use. These strategies include public education, voluntary initiatives and a municipal by-law.

Stakeholder Consultation:

The strategies suggested in "Playing it Safe" have been developed through dialogue with major stakeholders. Interviews were conducted in December 2001 with ten key stakeholders to determine the broad range of opinions about reducing pesticide use. The interviews helped to frame a stakeholder workshop that was held on January 23, 2002.

Approximately 65 stakeholders from a wide range of interests – including golf courses, school boards, lawn care companies both 'traditional' and 'organic,' local garden clubs, rate payers, children's health advocates, environmental groups, pesticide product manufacturers and pesticide product retailers – attended the day-long workshop to share their perspectives on the issue of pesticide use and the possible need to phase out non-essential outdoor uses on private property in Toronto. Stakeholders discussed their views on possible strategies to reduce and/or eliminate pesticides. They crafted a vision statement and identified key strategic approaches.

These approaches will be further considered by the public at a series of meetings tentatively scheduled for May 2002. The Record of the City of Toronto Stakeholder Meeting: Towards a Strategy for the Phase-out of Non-essential Uses of Pesticides is attached (Attachment 4).

Proposed Public Consultation:

Input from the public will provide specific insight into the feasibility of different approaches to reducing pesticides in Toronto and their effective implementation. Prior to the public meetings, the discussion document "Playing it Safe" and complementary background information on the proposed approaches will be made widely available. The information will be available through libraries, Access Toronto and on the City's web site as well as being distributed to the major stakeholders and those who have expressed an interest in this matter.

To ensure that residents from all areas of the city have the opportunity to comment on pesticide reduction, it is proposed that four meetings be held in different geographic areas of Toronto. A telephone line (416-338-1215) has been established so that those who are interested can be notified about the details of the public meetings. The City Web site will also provide information about the meetings, and if so desired the public can leave their comments on the "Have your Say about Reducing Pesticides" page.

The Medical Officer of Health is charged with seeking broad input on the nature and scope of a potential pesticides by-law and is being assisted by the TIE Pesticides Sub-committee and the Reference Group. It is anticipated that the Reference Group will provide input about the next steps of the public consultation process and will participate in the public meetings. They will provide advice to the TIE Pesticides Sub-committee on the results of the process.

Conclusions:

This report provides an update on the current and proposed activities related to the development of a strategy to reduce non-essential outdoor use of pesticides on private property for the City of Toronto. The attached documents entitled "Playing it Safe: Healthy Choices about Lawn Care Pesticides", "Pesticides: A Review of Human Exposure & Health Effects Research", "A Survey of Toronto Residents' Awareness, Uses and Attitudes Towards Lawn Pesticides" and "Record of City of Toronto Stakeholder Meeting: Toward a Strategy for the Phase-out of Non-Essential Uses of Pesticides" have been prepared to inform the public. The discussion document outlines possible strategies to reduce pesticide use including public education, voluntary initiatives and a municipal by-law to regulate the outdoor use of chemical pesticides. These strategic approaches, developed through dialogue with major stakeholders, will be further considered by key stakeholders and the general public at a series of meetings tentatively scheduled for May 2002.

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List of Attachments:

- (1) Toronto Public Health, Health Promotion & Environmental Protection Office. "Playing it Safe: Healthy Choices about Lawn Care Pesticides". (Will be available on April 8, 2002)
- (2) Toronto Public Health, Health Promotion & Environmental Protection Office. "Pesticides: A Review of Human Exposure & Health Effects Research".
- (3) Toronto Public Health, Health Promotion & Environmental Protection Office. "A Survey of Toronto Residents' Awareness, Uses and Attitudes Towards Lawn Pesticides".
- (4) Lura Consulting, "Record of City of Toronto Stakeholder Meeting: Towards a Strategy for the Phase-Out of Non-Essential Uses of Pesticides".