

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

December 27, 2002

To: Board of Health
From: Dr. Sheela V. Basrur, Medical Officer of Health
Subject: Dissemination of PCB Storage Site Information to the Public

Purpose:

To report on a mechanism to allow the public at large to have access to information on the locations of PCB storage sites in Toronto, and to request the province to ensure that PCB destruction methods meet new international obligations.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the Board of Health urge the Ontario Minister of the Environment, in keeping with international obligations under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, to move expeditiously to amend Ontario Regulation 362 to mandate the destruction of PCBs in storage and to ensure that the following criteria for destruction are met: destruction efficiency of effectively 100% of all PCBs; complete containment of all residues and wastes; and no uncontrolled releases to the environment; and
- (2) the appropriate city officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of June 18, 2001, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to report back on a mechanism to allow the public at large to have access to the information on the location of PCB storage sites in Toronto.

Comments:

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are a group of chlorinated compounds that were manufactured in the United States between 1929 and 1977 for uses predominantly as coolants and lubricants in electrical equipment. The production of PCBs was halted in the United States in 1977 (no PCB was ever manufactured in Canada) because of evidence of adverse environmental and human health effects from the manufacture, use and disposal of these chemicals. Today, PCBs can still be found in certain products made before 1977, such as hydraulic oils, and electrical devices including fluorescent lighting ballasts and capacitors.

Occupational exposures to large amounts of PCBs are associated with acne-like skin conditions and liver damage. Infants born to women who regularly consume fish and wildlife that are contaminated with PCBs are at risk of neurobehavioural and immunological problems. PCBs are considered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) as probable carcinogens to humans.

PCBs can enter the environment from accidental spills or leaks during their transportation or storage, and from leaks or fires involving products containing the chemicals. Fires of PCB substances are a particular public health concern because the combustion products of PCBs, including dioxins and furans, can be released into the air, where they can be inhaled and/or further dispersed into the environment. PCBs are very stable and slow to degrade in the environment, and they bio-accumulate in fatty tissues of fish and mammals.

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE), under Regulations 347 and 362 of the *Environmental Protection Act*, has the responsibility for regulating, approving and monitoring PCB waste storage sites. In December 2001, the MOE proposed amendments to Regulation 362 that would require all PCB wastes currently in storage to be destroyed within three years, with accelerated destruction of PCBs being stored at sensitive locations (e.g. schools and hospitals). If enacted, the amended Regulation will result in the elimination of all registered PCBs in storage in Ontario.

The destruction of PCBs and the elimination of stockpiles is in keeping with international obligations under the 2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. In July 2001, Toronto City Council adopted PCB destruction criteria as listed in "Harmonization of PCB Transfers, Decontamination and Waste Storage Procedures". These PCB destruction criteria reflect international obligations by specifying a destruction efficiency of effectively 100% of all PCBs; complete containment of all residues and wastes; and no uncontrolled releases to the environment.

It is recommended that the Board of Health urge the Ontario Minister of the Environment to expedite passage of the regulatory amendments to mandate the destruction of PCBs currently in storage using methods that meet international obligations.

The ultimate goal of PCB management is the elimination and destruction of PCB stocks. Until this is accomplished through federal and provincial requirements, the public can obtain information about existing PCB sites directly from the MOE which maintains a computerized inventory of all provincially registered PCB storage sites with more than 50 litres of PCBs. The number of PCB storage sites in Toronto has decreased steadily from about 340 sites in 1998 to about 200 in 2001. The computerized inventory contains information about the site location, company name, and a description of the quantities and forms of PCBs in storage (e.g. weight and number of transformers, weight and number of drums of ballasts, weight and number of capacitors). The inventory is updated continuously by the Environmental Monitoring and Reporting Branch of the Ministry as changes to site information are received (e.g. opening of new sites, closing of old sites, or changes to the quantity of PCBs in storage). A new version of the computerized records is released annually in a CD-ROM format and can be purchased directly from the Branch by any member of the public at a cost of \$75 (plus tax).

One option to facilitate public access to information on locations of PCB storage sites in Toronto would be for the City to purchase from the MOE a "site license" allowing the City to disseminate the Toronto-specific PCB information directly through its website. The public can then access this information using the mapping function within the Toronto website. This will, however, entail considerable amount of City resources to format and geo-code the data initially and to continuously maintain the site-specific information thereafter. Another important consideration is that the number and locations of operable PCB storage sites would be significantly reduced once the Provincial government passes its proposed regulatory amendments to require destruction of all PCB sites in Ontario within three years. Given that the public can currently purchase the PCB data directly from the MOE at a relatively low cost, Toronto Public Health does not view the option of purchasing a site licence from the Ministry as cost-effective.

While the MOE intends to disseminate the PCB storage site information to any interested persons or agencies at a relatively low cost, the information needed to order the CD-ROM is not easily found on the Ministry's website. To facilitate public access to the MOE's PCB storage site information, Toronto Public Health is in the process of adding the Ministry's CD-ROM ordering information to the City's website, along with a brief description of PCB-related health and environmental issues, as well as linkages to other relevant websites and publications.

Conclusions:

PCB storage site information in Ontario is maintained by the MOE and is available for purchase as a CD-ROM by the general public at \$75 plus tax. At present, the ordering information is not easily located from the Ministry's website. Toronto Public Health is in the process of adding the relevant PCB information/linkages to the City of Toronto website to facilitate public access to this information. In addition to facilitating public access to information on PCB storage sites in Toronto, it is important to ensure that any destruction of PCBs results in effectively 100%

destruction efficiency with no uncontrolled releases to the environment. It is therefore recommended that the Toronto Board of Health urge the Ontario Minister of the Environment to expedite the enactment of the regulatory amendments mandating destruction of stored PCBs in the Province and to ensure that the destruction and decontamination methods meet new international obligations in this regard.

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