

briefing note



Date: May 26, 2016
To: Board of Health
From: Heather Marshall, Campaigns Director
Re: HL12.3 – ChemTRAC Pollution Prevention Partnerships

Recommendations:

1. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to report back in the fourth quarter of 2016 on the implementation of a point-of-sale display program requiring all dry cleaners to clearly disclose to customers the types of solvents used to clean garments and any known hazards these solvents pose to public health.
2. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to collaborate with the General Manager, Toronto Water to ensure that solvents and other toxic chemicals used and potentially released to sewers by the following sectors be included in Toronto Water's current review of the Sewers By-law subject pollutants: auto body painting and repair, dry cleaning, fabricated metal product manufacturing, food manufacturing and food product manufacturing.

Background:

Toronto Public Health's ChemTRAC Program has identified Perchloroethylene as one of the substances of highest concern to public health in our city. This solvent is still widely used by the dry cleaning sector and presents significant health and environmental risks. Some cleaners are slowly beginning to transition to other chemical solvents but unfortunately these chemicals also pose health and environmental hazards unknown to business owners, workers and consumers.

Community members, consumers and workers have a right to know which chemicals are being used by dry cleaning shops so they can protect themselves from any potential health risks. Toronto's ChemTRAC Program collects data on chemicals used by dry cleaners and makes this information publicly available through an online database and interactive map. The challenge is that consumers must proactively seek out information about these chemicals and most people will not do this before making a purchase. This is why other jurisdictions that have right-to-know legislation are using additional measures, such as point-of-sale displays, to ensure that consumers can make an informed choice and reduce their exposure to toxic chemicals (Note 1).

Consumers visiting dry cleaning establishments are often faced with marketing claims like 'organic dry cleaning' and 'eco-friendly' even though many of these cleaners are using perc or other toxic solvents. A display program would help to counteract these misleading claims which suggest that these solvents are safe for their health and the environment.

'Perc-free' solvents create air and water pollution, yet they are not adequately regulated. Since Toronto Water is currently reviewing subject pollutants in the Sewers By-law, there is a rare opportunity to include these solvents in order to ensure proper management of chemical releases into our sewer system prior to being released into Lake Ontario.

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Note 1: Point-of-sale dry cleaning displays in other jurisdictions

New York City requires a public posting in the window of every dry cleaner to inform customers and workers of the associated risks to using Perchloroethylene and other hazardous chemical solvents such as hydrocarbons or siloxane. The regulation, Chapter 12 of Title 15 of the Rules of the City of New York Requiring Posting of Notices at Dry Cleaning Facilities, and information about the display notices is available at:

http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/air/dry_cleaner_msds.shtml

The State of Massachusetts is currently reviewing a proposed bill that would require disclosure of dry cleaning solvents to consumers and it is expected to pass in the coming months. The draft wording of Bill H.2068, an Act requiring disclosure of dry cleaning solvents, is available at:

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/189/House/H2068>

The City of Toronto's Toronto Public Health department currently runs two effective window display programs: DineSafe and BodySafe. A window display program for dry cleaners in Toronto could be a simple for consumers to understand at DineSafe and BodySafe.

Note 2

At City Council's request, Toronto Water is undertaking a chemical review of all subject pollutants currently regulated in the Sewers By-law. They will also be exploring the addition of emerging chemicals of concern that are being released into the sewer system and potentially pose risks to our drinking water source, the aquatic environment, and our wastewater infrastructure. The City Council Decision on Item PW9.5, Sewers By-law Pollution Prevention (P2) Program Stakeholder Update - 2015 and Sewers and Water Supply By-law Amendments, is available at: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.PW9.5>

For further information, please contact:

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