

CHRISTIE PITS: Pest control professionals turned away

City's top health official issues health warning

By JUSTIN SKINNER and DAVID NICKLE

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Toronto's top public health official issued a plea to residents around Christie Pits to allow pest control professionals to spray the growing pile of garbage at the temporary dump site there.

"It's difficult, but I would hope residents would recognize the concerns from a public health point of view of not allowing the city to carry out its pest control program," said Dr. David McKeown at a downtown news conference Thursday. "I'm asking residents to recognize that if we want to manage these sites in these extraordinary circumstances, in a way that prevents health problems, these pest control programs must be carried out."

Dr. McKeown made the statements after visiting the ice-rink at Christie and Bloor where the city has set up a temporary dump site.

The site, one of 19 across the city, has been the focus of a community protest - and Dr. McKeown said residents have been preventing city officials and contracted pest control experts from having access to maintain the site.

Local resident Govind Rao said he and many of his neighbours have joined CUPE in blocking pesticide company Orkin from the site. Residents, he said, feel the spraying will contribute to toxic leakage that spills out of the rink when it rains. He said runoff from the waste, particularly when combined with the pesticides being used, will contaminate the underground water table. This, he said, will likely have widespread ramifications as it works its way down to Lake Ontario.

"The permethrin they're spraying will basically contaminate the entire area and lake," Rao said.

He noted that the city has banned pesticides from parks and said residents did not want to see chemicals sprayed in their park.

He said if that access wasn't granted, he would have to issue an order to the city requiring it to spray the site.

And that, he said, could force the city to deal legally with protesters. "The city has legal options at its disposal," he said.

Dr. McKown, however, said the permethrin when properly applied wouldn't pose a risk to residents. And he said both he and the Ministry of the Environment concurred that the site was safe - for now.

But he said if rodent and insect populations are allowed to breed, the site could become a health hazard.

"My concern is the sites are not managed properly we will get an accumulation of rodents and flies and mosquitos which could pose a health hazard - they are capable of transmitting communicable diseases," he said. "These sites if they're managed well need not pose a risk to neighbours. They're unsightly, yes, but they need not be a health risk if they're managed properly."

Rao had launched an official complaint with the Ministry on Thursday, July 2, with concerns over leachate, potentially toxic runoff after rainwater works its way through a landfill.

"It's extremely dangerous stuff," he said. "It's full of organic waste, feces from diapers, toxins, heavy metals, and it's all getting swept right into Garrison Creek and into the surrounding area."

Residents are urging others to call the Ministry to lodge complaints and are setting a schedule during which they can monitor the comings and goings at the dump site in two-hour shifts.

This is in addition to ongoing protests and rallies, including a group excursion to Nathan Phillips Square on Canada Day, during which several residents brought bags of mock garbage to City Hall and pretending to dump them on city ground.