

Christie Pits group says it won't back down on pesticide spraying at temporary dump

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The group Friends of Christie Pits has stepped up its war against the temporary garbage dump in its community, vowing to ignore urgings from Toronto's top public health official that it stop preventing the site from being sprayed for insects.

Since Monday morning, the group, with the help of striking city workers, has been blocking a company contracted by the city to spray the insecticide permethrin on garbage stored in the outdoor rink near Bloor St. W. and Christie St.

The company has been stopped from entering the site at least five times since Monday morning.

Residents have simply stood in front of the company's trucks or where the garbage is stored. No spraying may take place with anyone other than a trained person in the vicinity.

The group believes the pesticide could leak and harm pets such as cats, although public health officials say permethrin breaks down quickly in the environment.

Dr. David McKeown, the city's medical officer of health, visited the site yesterday and later urged the residents to stand down.

"While I appreciate there are concerns about the use of pesticides, I am satisfied that the city is taking the necessary precautions to ensure pesticides are applied in a way that minimizes the risk to public health," he said, reading from a statement.

"I am issuing an appeal to residents who are concerned about the garbage to cooperate with city officials and to ensure access to these sites by the pest control operator."

But a spokesperson for the group, which wants the Christie Pits dump site closed altogether, said it will ignore McKeown's message.

"We're not going to let pesticide trucks in," said Govind Rao, adding that he found it "astounding" that McKeown could say the temporary dump isn't a health risk. The group says it intends to get a sample of runoff from the site tested in a lab.

The group had also suggested that because the site isn't being sprayed, it's in violation of Ministry of Environment permits to operate it as a temporary dump site. However, a spokesperson for the ministry, which inspected the site yesterday, said there are no violations.

McKeown said he could use his authority to order the city to spray and maintain the dump sites.