

Protests are the Pits

Residents upset over dumping site take out frustration on pest-control workers

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Last Updated: 3rd July 2009, 8:30am



Jakiw Zenczuk, 12, wears a mask as he and a friend stand in front of the entrance to the Christie Pits Arena yesterday. The strike by city workers is now in its 12th day. (Jack Boland, Sun Media)

Don't be such protesting pests!

Toronto's top doc is warning residents not to block the city's contract bug and vermin killers from spraying Christie Pits park's growing garbage stockpile.

So far, protesters and CUPE picketers have blocked Orkin from spraying the site a total of five times since Monday.

If the blockade is kept up, Dr. David McKeown warned yesterday he'll issue an order demanding the city spray the site and mop up the standing water the trash is swimming in under the Health Protection and Promotion Act. The order would force the city to take action.

Christie Pits has been a flashpoint of protest since city officials opened it as one of 19 temporary dump sites during the ongoing civic workers' strike.

'NECESSARY PRECAUTION'

After visiting the site yesterday morning, McKeown appealed to residents not to block pest control workers contracted by the city during the strike.

"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 any risk to public health," McKeown stated in an afternoon press release.

"It is essential that adequate pest control measures are maintained at these sites to prevent infestations of insects or rodents which may present a potential health hazard."

Since the strike began, the chief medical officer of health has maintained the piles of temporary trash are not health hazards if they are well-managed.

Earlier in the day, residents filed six complaints with the ministry of the environment about the parkland dump.

"We were originally told by the city manager that they'd be spraying every 24 hours, that was the protocol," said Friends of Christie Pits Park member Govind Rao. "I guess they were overzealous in their planned spraying.

"It's just indicative of how difficult it is to get any information out of the city."

Rao said residents are concerned about the pesticides.

"They cannot confirm that it's not toxic to the pregnant woman who lives 20 metres from the dump site," he said. "Democracy is in the dumps in this city."

But while the ministry said it will keep monitoring the situation, the complaints themselves were quickly trashed.

Five residents complained the city was violating its certificate of approval to operate the site by failing to spray for pests every 24 hours.

Ministry spokesman Kate Jordan said the certificate only calls for the city to spray as needed.

She added environment officers did attend the site and the ministry did follow up with the city.

"(The city) told us they have been trying to spray since Monday but they've had difficulty accessing the site," Jordan said.

A sixth resident complained rain water, contaminated by the garbage, was leaking onto a nearby soccer field, she said. Ministry officials said the city told them the boards around the outdoor rink prevent any seepage and that they've placed an absorbent boom around the site.

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