

Community Right-to-Know

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Community Right-to-Know is the public's right to having access to information on toxic chemicals that are used, stored and released in their community.

In 1999, with Toronto Board of Health support, the Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition was formed. The Occupational and Environmental working group is one of seven cancer risk factor working groups.

In 2001 the Occupational and Environmental working group recommended that:

"The City of Toronto, through the City Solicitor and with input from the Medical Officer of Health, should develop and implement a Community Right-to-Know Bylaw, as adopted by City Council in the Environmental Plan in 2000, and report on its development and implementation by the end of 2001. At the same time, the City should encourage other levels of government to develop Right-to-Know resources for the public".

This resolution went forward along with recommendations from the other working groups to form a Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition Action Plan. The Plan received Board of Health endorsement and was adopted by City Council in May 2001, without amendment.

In 2002, roundtables were convened to develop strategies for implementing the coalition action plan. The "Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition: Roundtable Recommendations" were adopted by Toronto's City Council in November 2002 identifying Community Right-to-Know as a priority.

In 2003, the Occupational and Environmental working group obtained funding for a Community Right-to-Know Pilot Project in the South Riverdale/Beaches area of Toronto. Through qualitative and quantitative assessments, gaps were identified in worker and community members' ability to access information on carcinogens and other chemicals to which they were being involuntarily exposed. Gaps in Occupational and environmental data are presented, along with case studies and recommendations.

A 'Secrecy is Toxic' campaign headed by the Toronto Environmental Alliance scanned NPRI release data for onsite releases of known or suspected carcinogens, respiratory toxins, reproductive, developmental and endocrine disruptors. "Reported Releases of Toxic Chemicals in Toronto" was developed mapping the toxic releases within Toronto. Recommendations, ongoing activities and distribution are presented.

Our continued work aims to assist Toronto Public Health in developing a Community Right to Know Strategy and Bylaw which will ultimately help reduce carcinogens and other toxins in the City of Toronto.