

A BRIEF PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF HEALTH
CONCERNING THE NEED FOR RIGHT TO KNOW LEGISLATION

by
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The incident in Bhopal, India has raised the question of whether a safe similar catastrophis could happen in Canada.

There seems to be an air of smugness. That it couldn't happen here.

That's untrue it can happen here. We have not had anything in the province that approaches the horrors of Bhopal.

But we have come close on numerous occasions. Every year in the province there are about 1,000 spills, leaks and discharges of hazardous material into our environment. Some of these occur right here in our city.

In 1979 many of us waited anxiously to find out what was going on in Mississauga when 250,000 people were evacuated because of the possibility chlorine gas would escape from a train wreck.

In 1982 another train wreck occurred north of Orillia forcing the evacuation of about 1,500 residents from the town of Hillsdale because of the threat of hydrochloric and hydrofluoric acid. That train passed through west Toronto.

On November 15 about a north prior to the tragedy in Bhopal, India the town of Fort Frances in Northwest Ontario was evacuated because of a spill of chlorine gfasa at a local paper mill. Two

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hundred metres away was a hospital with 400 patients. Luckily the wind was blown away from the town that day.

In Toronto we are not immune from such mishaps, although they too have been on a much smaller scale.

In the junction triangle there have been several incidents which certainly raise concern about the health of the people in the neighbourhood.

In 1982, 5 people were taken to hospital because of the spill of vinyl acetate. Three schools were closed.

In February 1984, 2 teachers and 5 students in the junction triangle became ill, suffered from dizziness, headaches and vomiting.

In March 1984, 5 firemen were overcome by fumes from a spill of nitric acid in a factory in the Junction Triangle.

In June 1982 an employee of Canada Packers on St. Clair Avenue was killed when a pipeline carrying ammonia leaked 2 co-workers were taken to hospital, 500 other employees were evacuated. The odour from the ammonia was noticeably as far away as Bloor Street.

These examples point for the need to inform communities about the way chemicals are stored, produced in a neighbourhood, or transported through a neighbourhood.

In addition, if the chemicals are such that special precaution should be taken: contingency plans should be developed with the active participation of community members.

A little more than a year ago the Toxic Substances Coalition presented the Board of Health with a proposal for a Right-to-know

by-law. We once again urge the Board to implement our recommendation.

For it is only when you have a well informed community that they willl begin to seek the measures that may well prevent some tragic incident from occurring.