



6

Tool Kit Item # 6

REDUCING POLLUTANTS IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD



6

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If you live in a neighbourhood in the City of Toronto, the Environmental Reporting and Disclosure Bylaw and the ChemTRAC program can provide valuable information about pollutants. Here are some ways that you can use the Bylaw to gather information and work with your community and local businesses towards preventing pollution.

IDENTIFY NEARBY SOURCES OF POLLUTION USING CHEMTRAC

In order to exercise your ‘right to know’ about chemicals used and released in your community, start by visiting the City of Toronto’s ChemTRAC website for more information at www.toronto.ca/health/chemtrac/index.htm. ChemTRAC identifies all of the companies that have reported their use and release of the 25 priority substances, as required by the Bylaw, across Toronto. Please read **Tool Kit #5** for detailed instructions and tips on using this site to get the chemical information you need. As you will learn from that Tool Kit, you can input an address on the map and it will show all of the companies that have reported nearby. Use your home address or another key landmark such as a nearby intersection to start.

MAKE A RECORD OF THE COMPANIES AND THE CHEMICALS CONTRIBUTING TO POLLUTION

Using the steps in Tool Kit #5 as a guide, write down which companies are reporting to ChemTRAC in your community. Take note of the companies that are sources of chemical releases and which are not. Determine which pollutants are present and how many kilograms (kg) are used and released of each chemical. Learn more about the potential health impacts of each substance by referring to **Tool Kit #2**.

You may notice that there are local companies you know of that are not showing up as ChemTRAC reporters. There could be a number of reasons why this is the case. The Environmental Reporting and Disclosure Bylaw that requires companies to report to ChemTRAC only focuses on 25 priority chemicals. There are many more chemicals released into Toronto, but Toronto Public Health identified these 25 as priority health concerns. Some companies are exempt from the Bylaw and others release one or more of these chemicals in such low quantities that they are below the threshold for reporting. In other cases, some companies may be required to report to ChemTRAC but they were unaware of the by-law.

RESEARCH OTHER COMPANIES THAT MIGHT RELEASE CHEMICALS

You can look up additional information on polluting companies in your community by consulting Canada’s **National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI)** at www.ec.gc.ca/inpr-npri/. NPRI allows you to search by community, substance or facility. If you enter the first three digits of your postal code, for example, NPRI will tell you what companies in your area are releasing pollutants and how much of each chemical they are releasing every year. All 25 of the City’s priority pollutants must be reported to NPRI. In addition, you will find hundreds of

other pollutants that aren't covered by the City's Bylaw. However, they are only reported if large amounts are being released. The thresholds for reporting are very high – on average 10 tonnes must be manufactured, processed or released before companies have to report. This means that you will find only the very large companies in your community on this database. Exceptions are made for mercury and lead, which must be reported at lower levels of release.

Ontario's Ministry of the Environment has also begun to require major companies to report their toxic chemical use and releases under the Toxics Reduction Act. You can search this information by looking up the city, facility name, company, sector or substance on an interactive map at the following site: <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/mapping/trais/index.htm>. The data collected by the province, which duplicates most of the NPRI data with the addition of acetone, can be found at: http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/resources/collection/data_downloads/index.htm#Toxics. Under this Act, companies must also develop pollution prevention plans and share summaries of these plans with the public.

Aside from government run websites, there are a number of non-governmental groups that have designed helpful websites. For example, **Emitter** helps you find the major polluters in your neighbourhood using the same NPRI data but in a different, easy to use format. Emitter gives you the options of finding out the problems using riding boundaries or distances such as "within 5 kilometres". It ranks the polluters on a scale from "good" to "bad". If you click on the company, you will get a link to their NPRI information, their contact information and the contact information for your federal Member of Parliament. See www.emitter.ca/.

PollutionWatch is another site worth checking to locate polluting companies in your community and see the historical record. PollutionWatch is a project of the Canadian Environmental Law Association and Environmental Defence. Although the data on PollutionWatch only track pollutants up until 2006, PollutionWatch gives you the ability to look for health effects of certain chemicals, to find out whether pollutants are increasing or not, and ranks companies across Canada with respect to their emissions. This information and more is available at www.pollutionwatch.org/.

Lastly, **CAREX Canada** is a great website that profiles known and suspected carcinogens and provides estimates of both environmental and occupational exposure across Canada. In their Tutorials & Tools section you will find training modules and resources such as the eRisk Tool which can help you explore potential lifetime excess cancer risks due to environmental exposure. See <http://www.carexcanada.ca> for more details.

AUDIT YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD BY DOING A WALK-AROUND

Are the companies now identified in your community and marked on your map the ones you've noticed or been concerned about in your neighbourhood? A good way to check the accuracy of ChemTRAC and other reporting programs like NPRI is to take a walk around the streets of your neighbourhood and find the companies that should have reported. Is the printing company around the corner reporting to ChemTRAC? What about the brewery a couple of streets over?

A good way to audit your community and to keep track of the reporting companies in your neighbourhood and assess local pollution problems is to create a community map. There are easy to use web-based programs such as Batchgeo found at www.batchgeo.com or Google's My Maps at http://earth.google.com/outreach/tutorial_mymaps.html. Another option is to

6

use a print out map and take it with you as you walk around your neighbourhood. This is a great activity to do with your family, neighbours or community association members to engage them on chemical pollution concerns as well as learn a lot more about your area!

If you find local companies that are not reporting to ChemTRAC, mark them on your map and take down information on the company such as their name, address and the type of business they run. To find out why these companies did not report or to get more information about ChemTRAC, email Toronto Public Health staff at chemtrac@toronto.ca or phone the City's customer service representatives about ChemTRAC at **3-1-1** within Toronto city limits (this service operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). It might be good news for your neighbourhood because the company has no pollutants and doesn't need to report, or you might have stumbled on a company that didn't know they had to report.

START A DIALOGUE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Now you know what the air pollution problems in your neighbourhood are. If you find companies that are releasing pollutants into your neighbourhood at levels you find unacceptable, perhaps it's time to talk with your neighbours and local companies. Your strategy will be unique to your neighbourhood and the local situation. Some companies may be very willing to meet regularly with you, and some may require more pressure to make changes. You can be creative in how you pursue your objectives.

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS ON HOW TO GO FORWARD:

- **Form a group or work alone.** If you prefer to do it on your own, even one person's effort can make a big difference. Your voice is stronger if you are a member of a larger group. You may find that there already is a neighbourhood association or a local environmental group involved in an effort to improve local air quality e.g. the South Riverdale Community Health Group. If not, consider creating a group.
- **Decide on a plan and do additional research on the companies.** Do you want to approach one particular company that is located near you? Or do you want to tackle a number of different companies and see what response you get? For more information on individual companies, the Ministry of Environment can tell you what approvals have been given to companies through their permits to operate – called certificates of approval (C of A). You can also search the Internet to see if companies have been in the news for any reason – for example, if they've had a change of ownership or a serious spill.
- **Find the pollution prevention strategies that apply to this type of industry.** If it's a printing company, for example, look up examples of companies that have successfully implemented pollution prevention measures. Refer to **Tool Kit Item #4** for detailed information on pollution prevention case studies, resources and much more. As an example, Toronto Public Health has developed pollution prevention strategies for different industry sectors (www.toronto.ca/health/chemtrac/gogreen.htm) and in the United States there is a Toxics Use Reduction Institute dedicated to this work www.turi.org/.

6

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS ON HOW TO GO FORWARD: CONT'D

- **Raise your concerns with the company or companies that you have decided to approach.** You should have a contact name and address from the ChemTRAC website or NPRI. Write a letter or send an email that describes your interest in the air quality in your neighbourhood and how you might work together to improve it. Suggest that the company meet with you or your group keeping in mind that pollution prevention is a win-win for the company and the community. The company may be able to make relatively easy substitutions such as using water-based detergents instead of solvents for degreasing metals. In some cases, companies may have to make an investment in new equipment to reduce pollution. However, our pollution prevention case studies show that many of the companies that made these investments found that the payback period is often short, sometimes less than a year. Companies stand to save money on operating costs, improve conditions for workers in the plant, enhance their reputations as a green business, and, if they're really diligent, reduce their use and emissions of chemicals of concern to the point where they can avoid having to report to ChemTRAC.
- **If the company agrees to meet with you, consider proposing regular meetings.** Alternatively, if the company does not agree to meet with you or does not respond, consider having a meeting in a local community center about local air pollutants and invite the Ministry of Environment, representatives of the company and your Councillor. Call your local community newspaper in advance to advertise the meeting and also to let them know so they can attend and report on the discussion.
- **Inform your political representatives about your concerns.** When discussing pollutants in your neighbourhood, your local councillor should be the most receptive to your concerns. After all, he or she lives there too. Your Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) should also be kept in the loop about your efforts to reduce pollution since pollution control is essentially the province's responsibility. Your federal Member of Parliament (MP) should also be kept informed. They are your representatives and your concerns should be their concerns.



6

FOR MORE RESOURCES TO ENHANCE THE DIALOGUE IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

GOOD NEIGHBOUR CAMPAIGNS

You can also benefit from the experience of other communities with what have been called “Good Neighbour Campaigns”. Information on how other communities have made progress with neighbouring plants and the strategies and resources they used to take action is all available on their website: www.goodneighbourcampaigns.ca.

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLLUTION HOTLINE

Whenever you smell or see a potential pollution problem, contact the Ministry of Environment immediately. Encourage other residents or other members of your organization to do the same. These complaints become part of the public record, create a paper trail and require the Ministry staff to investigate the issue. Complaints can be anonymous. However, it’s better to leave your name and phone number so Ministry staff can update you and/or call you back for additional information. If you are calling during regular business hours, the number of the Toronto District Office is **416-326-6700**. To register a complaint after hours or on weekends, call the Pollution Hotline at **1-866-663-8477 (1-866-MOE-TIPS)**. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

TORONTO CANCER PREVENTION COALITION

The Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition has a great website with lots of facts, studies and initiatives focused on reducing the risks of cancer in Toronto. There is an Environmental and Occupational Carcinogens Working Group, which has a wide ranging membership that includes community members and health, environmental, and labour organizations dedicated to working together to prevent cancer. Learn about their recommendations for action by visiting their website at http://www.toronto.ca/health/tcpc/environment_occupation.htm .