



WHAT'S NEW...

CRTK BYLAW VICTORY!

On Wednesday, December, 3, 2008, the City of Toronto Councillors voted 33-3 in favour of adopting the Community Right-to-Know Bylaw which will go into effect on January 1st, 2010. The bylaw has three key elements: 1) About 7,000 small and medium-sized businesses will be required to report annually to the city if they use or release any of the 25 polluting substances above specified thresholds; 2) The city will provide education programs to help facilities estimate data, report and identify ways to reduce chemicals and prevent pollution; 3) The public will be able to access the data through a website.

This is a serious bylaw: failures to report are met with stiff fines – \$5,000 for the first offence and \$25,000 for the second. The 25 substances (click to [see list](#)) covered under the bylaw are considered to be carcinogenic and a threat to public health. Just before the final vote, Councillor Adam Vaughan made a plea for the bylaw to be adopted. His mother died from cancer probably as a result of working in a lab that did radioactive testing during WWII. Although you can't turn back the clock, he said, you just want to know what caused her cancer. In fact, we all have a right to know what we are being exposed to in our air, water and soil.



TOXIC TRESPASS DVD OUT

The long-awaited DVD release is finally here! Order your copy from the [WHEN website](#) today. Comes in a one- or two-disc set; both include the resource guide, *Taking Action on Children's Health and the Environment*.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT. This year, please consider becoming a WHEN monthly donor. A token amount per month makes a big difference to volunteer-based charities like us. To find out more, visit [About WHEN](#).

HEALTH CANADA SUPPRESSES REPORT

Last July the federal government released a report on climate change called, *Human Health in a Changing Climate*. In what is thought to be a Machiavellian move, however, the report was made public on a Friday just before the Canada Day long weekend. The release was supposed to be accompanied by a coast-to-coast public engagement exercise. Instead the Harper government quietly cancelled the publicity exercise and provided no on-line access.

The report warns of forest fires, drought, and increased deaths from smog, heat and disease – a grim scenario against which the government is taking virtually no action. Frequent bouts of extreme weather – such as droughts, violent storms, heat waves and cold snaps – are expected to produce a higher risk of injuries, illnesses and stress-related disorders.

The authors call on the government to prepare for these sweeping threats. But Health Minister Tony Clement's response was that Canadians will “have to get used to” the gloomy scenario laid out in the report.

Stay tuned via the [WHEN website](#) as we join others who seek to create a space where we might hear directly from the report's authors in the near future.

Calendar of Events

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2009

On March 7, march and rally for women's rights! (No, we are still not there yet.) In Toronto, visit the WHEN table at the IWD Fair afterwards hosted in the Ryerson Students Union Bldg on Saturday, March 7, and pick up some high-quality t-shirts! 55 Gould St., Toronto. For more information, see www.iwdtoronto.com

NO NEW NUKES IN ONTARIO- RENEWABLES NOW!

The Ontario Clean Air Alliance is hosting an anti-nuke teach-in over two days March 13-14. On Friday evening, a screening of the Battle of Chernobyl, on Saturday, a series of workshops between 10a.m.-4 p.m. University of Toronto. For more information, please contact Angela@cleanairalliance.org

Taking Action for Prevention

A Ban on Plastic Bags... Finally

By Melanie Best

Last December, Toronto City Council approved a motion providing for a 5¢ levy on plastic grocery bags starting June 1, 2009 in an effort to reduce the pervasiveness of this highly problematic convenience. It is certainly not the first jurisdiction to try to turn back the clock on the matter of plastic bags. Walking around the city, or even the country, it is hard to avoid seeing plastic bag garbage crop up in too many places to count. Of course, we get used to it, even learn to ignore it, but think about this: if we see them everywhere – and they are pretty much indestructible – then they are covering the whole earth.

There are many issues to take up on the matter of plastic bags, but the one that burns me the most is about all the wildlife that is choking on them. Just so we humans can have a bit more convenience in our lives? ‘Cause really that’s all it boils down to, “a bit more convenience”.

When my grandmother did her daily shopping back home, she went out every morning with her collection of sturdy canvas and string bags, and came back with them full, schlepping them up five flights of stairs by herself. She worked hard on food production for her family – and saving herself carrying the empty bags on her way out hardly made a dent in the job. Today we are surrounded by conveniences that make this job far less physically taxing – is the plastic bag waiting at the store really necessary?

Plastic bags fill up landfills and eventually break down into small pieces that choke birds; their manufacture uses tons of precious petroleum and releases nasty pollutants into our air, some of it right in our backyard, as shown in the film [Toxic Trespass](#).

Toronto’s move follows measures taken in other jurisdictions. Ireland was one of the first developed countries to make a move, with a bag tax introduced in 2002. Less developed countries also implemented restrictions on plastic bags; countries like Uganda, South Africa, Taiwan and Bangladesh – where the government introduced a ban after it was found they were blocking drainage systems and were a major culprit during the 1988 and 1998 floods that submerged two-thirds of the country. And to the surprise of many, last year China also banned plastic bags -- outright. China was spending \$37 million in crude *per year* on plastic bag production.

We need to be prepared for the backlash – the plastic bag industry doesn’t like it, and they won’t waste time letting us know – though they will waste a whole lot of money doing so. When San Francisco and Philadelphia tried to pass an outright ban a couple of years ago, the plastic bag industry pulled out all the stops pressuring the city’s governors – and eventually succeeded in forcing a withdrawal of the ban and a switch to recycling. Luckily, a year later San Francisco was able to show recycling wasn’t working and enforced the ban.

Community pressure will be very important to ensure Toronto City Council eventually bans free plastic bags outright.

Taking Action for Prevention is a regular feature where volunteers and friends of WHEN can share their experiences. If you would like to contribute to a future issue, contact us at office@womenshealthyenvironments.ca.

New Year, turning over a new leaf

By Mahalia Freed, ND

“I hereby resolve...” Do your resolutions fit with your life? With the season?

A fresh start – like the start of the New Year – can feel great. There is the exhilaration of yet-to-be-realized potential, the excitement of what-may-happen, the drive to begin actualizing those resolutions. Yet there is also the letdown post-holidays, the cold, grey days, ongoing stress at work or at home. How can you honor and sustain your health resolutions this year? While the depths of winter are not the best time to do a liver cleanse or a juice fast, it is a fine time to renew your commitment to self-care. Winter is a yin time – a time for introspection and creativity, a time for invigorating skis and then cozy evenings in, a time to nourish with warm whole foods and warming tea. Why not integrate medicinal teas into your routine this season?



Following up on the stress and digestion piece in the fall newsletter, this article highlights the wisdom of herbs as complex living medicines that cross body systems to provide us with just the support that we need. Did you know that there are herbs that soothe both the digestive tract and the nervous system?

To read the rest of this article, please visit:

www.womenshealthyenvironments.ca/naturopath

Ask Dr. Mahalia

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