

19 mini-dumps to take garbage

Selected park and arena parking lots to accept residential waste from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. during strike

Published On Fri Jun 26 2009

Nineteen locations across the city – from North Toronto to the Western Beaches to the Portlands – have been turned into mini-dumps as the city struggles to cope with waste from its five-day-old strike.

The city announced yesterday the "temporary drop-off sites" are accepting residential waste from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., seven days a week, for the duration of the strike. There's no fee and no bag limit, but garbage must be double-bagged.

The sites are marked by blue fencing and are located on paved surfaces, typically parking lots. Many are in parks, angering residents.

"We're profoundly disappointed and shocked," said Christopher Holcroft from Green 13, a volunteer group opposed to the dump in the parking lot at Sunnyside Park. That location wasn't among the 12 sites opened during the 2002 strike.

Green 13 is pressuring its local city councillor, Bill Saundercook, to close the site.

Saundercook could not be reached last night.

"Creating a garbage dump – even temporarily – where families picnic, children play, cyclists ride and tourists visit, creates more than aesthetic problems. It poses unknown environmental risks to the surrounding parkland and lake, and it undermines the very idea of shared public spaces," the group said.

Mark Winfield, assistant environment professor at York University, said the dump sites pose no immediate health threat.

"A hard surface is probably better than on the ground, but there will likely be some leaching and stuff may start to leak out," he said.

Some of it will drain into sewers and some could run into surface waters such as the Don and Humber rivers.



Lawson Oates, director of the City of Toronto's Environment Office, takes in the scene behind the strike line at the Commissioners St. Transfer Station during the deluge on June 25, 2009.

LUCAS OLENIUK/TORONTO STAR

"The leaching could harm wildlife and might harm fish depending on what leaches out, but the human health problem is more a nuisance issue around smell and vermin," said Winfield. The immediate likelihood of runoff polluting drinking water is unlikely, he said.

But the closer the dumps are to residential areas, the worse it could be, said University of Toronto civil engineering professor Philip Byer. "In this heat, the odours could be pretty bad," he said.

While the city can use sprays to control the odour and vermin, there is only so much such measures can achieve, he admitted.

It is a reality the Friends of Christie Pits, a group opposed to the temporary dump established in the park's large skating rink, know all too well. The group held a demonstration yesterday morning.

Christie Pits was used as a temporary dump in 2002. Serious problems occurred after large piles of garbage became infested with maggots and rodents. The stench grew so bad that children begged their parents to take them home within minutes of visiting the park.

The group assembled yesterday fears a repeat of that experience and slammed their local councillor, Deputy Mayor Joe Pantalone, who had earlier this week promised Christie Pits wouldn't be on the list.

Pantalone said yesterday he learned a few days ago that Christie Pits was under "active consideration" as a site. He spoke to senior officials in charge of solid waste operations, city manager Joe Pennachetti, even Mayor David Miller.

"I'm disappointed and remain totally opposed to it. I think it's simply wrong," Pantalone fumed.

Also disappointed were people hoping to get rid of their trash at the temporary sites after 7 p.m.

Because the sites are picketed only from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., trash is not being accepted after hours. Private security guards have been hired to prevent after-hours dumping.

"I have to work during that time," said Jose Vaz, who drove from his Rogers and Caledonia Rds. home to drop off his neatly packed refuse at Christie Pits at 8 p.m.

"I pay my taxes, this should be open 24 hours. The smell is getting bad in my garage and in my neighbour's garage," he said.

With files from Nicole Baute, Noor Javed and Henry Stancu