

## Residents, tourists turned off by stench of streets

Garbage strike enters second week

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Family parks have become makeshift dumping grounds, irate residents are facing off against each other and tourists are thinking twice about the pristine place called Toronto as the most populous city in Canada enters into its second week of a stinky summertime strike.

About 24,000 inside and outside municipal workers walked off the job June 22, bringing garbage pickup to a halt and closing city-run daycares, parks and recreation programs, swimming pools and ferry service.

A key issue for workers is pay for unused sick days, a benefit the city said it can no longer afford.

On Sunday, residents had some reprieve from the pungent smell of rotting refuse as rain and cooler temperatures masked the stench.

But that didn't calm the concerns of a furious community living across the street from a temporary dump site set up by the city west of the downtown core.

"It's really stinky and there's children everywhere and I have to sit through it and people are taking to it so easily. They're just going there and dumping it," said Sarah Beals, who lives near the basketball-court-turned-dumping-ground.

"It's out of sight and out of mind," she added, grimacing at the street lined with car loads full of people ready to toss their trash.

The location, Christie Pits Park, is blocks of grassy land, which is home to little league games, walking paths and a swimming pool.

Residents have erected prominent, colourful signs declaring that the area is "our park not a dump," and have confronted people pulling wagons filled with litter and driving pickup trucks stuffed with rotting rubbish.

"It smells and there are toxins released to keep the pests under control," said Iris Haeussler, as she sat on her porch, watching people cart over their bulging bags.

She is concerned about the health hazards and upset that children on the street can't use the green space.

Ms. Haeussler said she is embarrassed about the state of the streets and with visitors coming in from Switzerland next week, she is afraid they will be horrified by the mess.

"What they will experience is an awful, awful smell and stink," said Ms. Haeussler, adding any tourist would be turned off by the stench.

It's a fear well-founded.

Sunday drew thousands of tourists to the downtown core to partake in the annual gay Pride Parade, and many commented on the sloppy streets.

Leilania Mroczkowski had come all the way from Syracuse, N.Y., for the festivities, but was bewildered by the sight of overflowing garbage bins.

Decked out in a rainbow coloured kerchief, and huddled under the gay pride flag, Ms. Mroczkowski said she wasn't impressed by some of the tourist attractions.

"I think it's kind of bad we were in Chinatown walking around and there's just piles of trash next to the garbage cans," Ms. Mroczkowski said.

"When you have trash in your hands you don't want to walk around and people are just dumping it next to trash

cans or anywhere, it's kind of gross,” she said.

By many, Toronto is considered a clean city, free of the worst kinds of grime, garbage and dirt common in most major cities.

But that's not how visitors saw the city on Sunday.

“I think looking at the rubbish I can say it's not so clean,” said Rui Oliveira, a visitor from Brazil who was in the Toronto to see the parade.

Organizers of the Pride Parade agreed not to hire any private cleanup crews for the event, but the city had assured people that contract crews would be on site to sweep away any debris.

Vince Savoni was also an out-of-towner who came into the city to see the parade. The Windsor resident said he has some experience with the messy situation.

“If it goes as long as Windsor has it will be a big problem, especially in a big city like Toronto,” said Mr. Savoni, who added the frustration is mounting in Windsor as a similar strike enters its 12th week.

For now, it seems the stench will stay. The City of Toronto is still negotiating with the members of two locals from the Canadian Union of Public Employees representing the 6,200 outside workers and 18,000 inside workers.

Pat Daley, a CUPE local spokeswoman, said there has been little movement on the talks.