

Trash in park is the pits

Residents protest city's choices for garbage storage

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Garbage piles up in Christie Pits yesterday, angering residents who say their park should not be used as a garbage dump during the strike. (ALEX UROSEVIC/Sun Media)

As the sun started to set last night, Christie Pits Park was teeming with kids playing baseball and riding their bikes, slow-walking parents trying to keep an eye on their youngsters, and couples lying on the grass.

But in the northwest corner of the park, a horseshoe-shaped pile of garbage bags was growing in the hockey rink. Just outside that rink about 100 angered residents staged a protest against the city's decision to let locals use the rink as an impromptu garbage dump during the city workers' strike.

They chanted "Parks are not dumps!" and carried signs that read "Wake up and smell the roses, not the garbage" just outside the concrete-floor rink. Inside, where there were hundreds of trash bags, rat traps have been set up along the boards.

"This is awful, this is just appalling," said Monica Gupta, chair of the Friends of Christie Pits organization. "Parks are for people, not garbage."

Residents are calling on the city to stop allowing city parks to be used as garbage dumps. Protesters last night repeated the adage that their protest wasn't just about Christie Pits, but about every park across Toronto.

The city has allowed 19 sites across the city to be used as makeshift dumps. They are open seven days a week from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. during the strike.

Gupta said the city should be using municipal parking lots as dump sites instead of parks. She said the port lands or the CNE would even be better dumping venues than local parks.

"I think the mayor is one who should be called to respond," Gupta said. "This is not an issue we take lightly."

Residents were also angered that their city councillor and deputy mayor, Joe Pantalone, wasn't at last night's meeting. One young girl carried a sign that read "Liar, Liar Pant(s)alone on Fire!"

Pantalone said a day earlier in a statement that he gave staff a list of alternative dumping locations in his ward but they fell on deaf ears.

"I strongly oppose the use of this location as a dump site and will continue to advocate this position," Pantalone said in his statement. "Christie Pits should not be used as a dump!"

Still, protesters last night were wondering where Pantalone was. Some said he should've been there regardless, even if he was at risk of being trashed verbally by frustrated residents.

"We didn't give him enough notice, in all fairness," Gupta said. "He did try, he did have a previous engagement."

Boris Steipe, a professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Toronto, also lives near the park. Steipe was at the rally last night to highlight the environmental and health hazards caused by the garbage collecting in the park. He called it a breeding ground for flies and maggots.

"The only way to control this is to put massive amounts of insecticide on it," Steipe said. "So either we have a fly infestation here or we're going to have massive amounts of insecticides. The other problem is that we're going to have moulds and fungus. And these moulds -- many of them are pathogenic. They cause disease."

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