

# *The Story of Toronto's Campaign for Right to Know*

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for the

The Environmental and Occupational Carcinogens Working Group of the Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition

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**1985** - In November of 1985, Sandy MacPherson, then Medical Officer of Health issued a detailed discussion paper *The Right to Know: a By-law for the City of Toronto*. It recommended that the City develop a right to know (RTK) by-law similar to ones developed in US municipalities. Concurrently, the Province had introduced changes to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to implement the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS).

**1986** - In August 1986 City Council approved the concept with recommendations that the Province be requested to enact enabling legislation to permit the City to enact its bylaw.

**1987** - The Ministry of Labour wrote to Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton requesting that the City not proceed with their request for special enabling legislation. The Ministry argued that Provincial legislation would serve the role of community RTK as the public could access WHMIS information through their Medical Officer of Health (MOH). However, this approach proved to be under-utilized and unworkable.

**1999** - When the Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition (TCPC) was founded in 1999, it created two Working Groups on environmental and occupational issues based on the primary risk factors for cancer identified by the 1995 Ontario Taskforce on the Primary Prevention of Cancer.

**2001** - The two Working Groups merged into the Environmental and Occupational Carcinogens Working Group and prepared a background paper [\*Preventing Occupational and Environmental Cancer: a Strategy for Toronto\*](#) outlining their collective action plans to target key carcinogens.

**2002** - In order to determine the origins of harmful pollutants in Toronto's air, then Medical Officer of Health Sheela Basrur recommends assessments of exposures and pathways in a report to the Board

of Health - [Ten Key Carcinogens in Toronto Workplaces and Environment: Assessing the Potential for Exposure](#).

**2003** - The E&O Carcinogens Working Group initiates a communications plan which was adopted for use by the TCPC. It focused on the central statement "Cancer doesn't have to happen" and was used to again launch a Community Right to Know Campaign in Toronto.

**2003-2004** - The E&O Carcinogens Working Group conducts a case study in the Riverdale/Beaches neighbourhoods on how much information residents could access about emissions from facilities in their area. This study concluded there was inadequate access to information and a need to know more to protect public health.

**June 19, 2006** - The Board of Health adopts recommendations to setup a community right to know environmental reporting strategy for Toronto, and commenced consultations.

**2006-2008** - The E&O Carcinogens Working Group campaigns for the strategy to be implemented through a bylaw. Central to this campaign was the [Toronto Environmental Alliance](#) Secrecy is Toxic and Good Neighbours Campaigns.

**December 2008** - Toronto adopts an [Environmental Reporting and Disclosure Bylaw](#) and sets up the [ChemTRAC data reporting system](#) for Toronto facilities required to report under the bylaw. Toronto Public Health commences extensive education and outreach efforts on the bylaw.

**2009** - The E&O Carcinogens Working Group writes unsuccessful grant proposal to the Canadian Partnership against Cancer to assist Vancouver and other cities with their interest in RTK bylaws.

**2010 -2011** - The Working Group scopes and submits a successful proposal to Toronto's ChemTRAC grant program to engage the public in the South Riverdale, Beaches, and Jane-Finch neighborhoods to use the bylaw to benefit their communities.

**2012-2013** - The E&O Carcinogens Working Group holds neighborhood meetings and a workshop to promote community use of Toronto's bylaw. They develop and circulate a Community toolkit to promote wide use of the bylaw to improve community and environmental health, commence neighborhood mapping of Phase 1 ChemTRAC data, as well as develop other resources for use to move "Beyond the Bylaw" to pollution prevention.

Preparations are underway for community engagement when the Phase 2 ChemTRAC data are released in 2013 resulting in a much richer dataset of additional information on exposures.

***The Environmental and Occupational Working Group's plans for the future are to:***

Put a much more public face on the environmental and occupational causes of cancer in Toronto.

Assist with integrating our work throughout other City of Toronto programs.

Provide an accessible, interactive and informative website for our ChemTRAC work using mapping and new surveillance tools to paint a better picture of Toronto neighborhood health and cancer. We will continue to promote our coalition work as a model to others across Canada. For more information please visit the websites of the Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition

<http://www.toronto.ca/health/tcpc/> and ChemTRAC

<http://www.toronto.ca/health/chemtrac/index.htm> .