



Office of the Commissioner
of Health Services

August 3, 2004

Dr. Barbara Yaffe
Acting Medical Officer of Health
Toronto Public Health
277 Victoria Street, 5th Floor
Toronto, ON M5B 1W2

Dear ^{Barbara} Dr. Yaffe:

Re: Disposal of Biomedical Wastes Generated in the Home

On June 10, 2004, York Regional Council directed the Health Services Department to contact other public health units in the Greater Toronto area to inform them of the challenges facing The Regional Municipality of York regarding the improper disposal of solid wastes generated in the home that contain radioactive materials, and request those public health units to communicate with their local medical care establishments that may serve York Region residents.

In 2003, York Region started sending municipally-collected solid waste to landfills in Michigan, United States. These trucks are required to pass through radiation detection equipment operated by United States Customs at the border, and the United States have expressed zero tolerance for any degree of radioactivity.

Therefore, radiation detection equipment has been installed at transfer stations that receive York Region's municipally-collected solid waste. All waste vehicles pass through the equipment, and if they are found to be radioactive, they are diverted to a special area where the solid waste is carefully unloaded and scanned with a hand-held radiation detection device. The radioactive item is removed and then the remainder of the solid waste is processed in the normal manner.

Although there are several sources of radioactive materials, the primary source experienced in York Region is diapers disposed of by incontinent patients who have received chemotherapy treatment. York Region has also found spent chewing gum disposed of by patients who have received treatment for cancer of the thyroid.

It costs approximately \$300 for labour and equipment every time the above special procedure is carried out to deal with a radioactive load. From January 1, 2003 to March 31, 2004 approximately 90 radioactive loads have been delivered by the contracted collection vehicles of the local municipalities. The cost for the special handling of radioactive loads is approximately \$20,000 per year.

For these reasons, I would request that your public health unit communicate local medical care establishments to reinforce the proper handling of these waste materials with affected patients. These materials must either be placed into specific biomedical containers and returned to the hospital for proper disposal, or collected and disposed of by a licensed biomedical waste collection company.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Dr. K. Helena Jaczek MD,CCFP,MHSc,MBA,CHE
Commissioner of Health Services
and Medical Officer of Health

Letter also sent to:

Durham Region Health
Health Department, Regional Municipality of Peel
Simcoe Country District Health Unit