

Executive Overview & Recommendations

Introduction:

Two focus groups were conducted on the evening of October 4, 2007 at a Markham community centre. A total of 17 female and male heads of household participated representing Markham, Milliken Mills, Thornhill and Unionville. Here follows the key findings, conclusions and recommended courses of action.

New Pesticide Bylaw

- ❖ At least half of the participants claimed that they were aware of the new pesticide bylaw, however most did not have any detailed knowledge about it. However, they anticipated that Town of Markham would launch a public education initiative to provide the essential facts.
- ❖ The bylaw restricting the types of pesticides that could be used for cosmetic purposes made good sense – “it’s about time”. This bylaw was synonymous with current health and safety standards, particularly aimed at protecting vulnerable children and family pets. Some participants were already curtailing their use of harmful sprays and no longer saw the need for regular applications of pesticides.
- ❖ They bylaw was seen as de rigueur for progressive politicians and jurisdictions. Markham was seen as a leading edge municipality that consistently broke new ground, i.e. innovations in blue box recycling and green bin organic collection.
- ❖ Study participants fully endorsed curtailing the application of toxic pesticides for cosmetic purposes on public and private lawns and gardens. The only permissible exceptions should be golf courses (according to male respondents) and all properties in the event of widespread infestations of harmful insects.
- ❖ While respondents heartily endorsed the new pesticide regulation in principle, some feared that it could have a negative impact on the Town’s high property maintenance standards. Could it lower property values and herald a more laissez faire approach?
- ❖ Many respondents were relieved to learn that there were many familiar brands permissible under the new bylaw. Clearly, they had feared that they would have very few options and would have to make do with homemade remedies plus lots of physical work digging up weeds. Markham’s new, more environmentally friendly pesticide regime was not at all onerous.
- ❖ Markham residents have learned that pesticide application can have adverse health impacts but given their lack of awareness of the harmful chemical components, were unable to apply this knowledge to other product categories such as household cleaning products.
- ❖ The majority of householders did not engage lawn care contractors for spraying or maintenance chores. It was cheaper to do the work themselves. However, exposure to this sector was common due to its members’ aggressive marketing tactics.



Compliance & Enforcement

- ❖ Respondents believed that compliance would be achieved if the bylaw was enforced and paired with education aimed at the key sectors. The following chart summarized the target groups, expected compliance and acceptable enforcement measures.

Sector/Priority	Expected Compliance	Enforcement
1. Contractors - Experts, users.	100% - Condition of operating in Markham	Spots checks, random inspections Immediate severe fines Revoke licenses of multiple offenders
2. Residents – customers & users	High, if educated	Assume ignorance & educate. Repeat education & threaten fines Fine offenders – scale of fines \$150 to \$1,000. Neighbourhood pressure & lawn signs
3. Retailers – product providers	High, if educated	Provide list of acceptable and prohibited products Educate staff Monitor Customer intervention & complaint

- ❖ The Town was advised to issue licenses to lawn care contractors once they have demonstrated their knowledge of the new bylaw's conditions. This license would lend confidence for potential customers because the average householders could not be expected to assess their qualifications.
- ❖ Markham retailers should be given lists of acceptable pesticides and those that should no longer be made available. Residents believed that non-complying products did not belong on the shelves of local retailers; offering them for sale confused customers and sabotaged the new bylaw.
- ❖ The Town was expected to enforce, and be seen to enforce, the new pesticide regulations because it was an important public health issue. They were clear that it should not be treated in a laissez faire fashion, akin to the approach applying to lawn watering restrictions.
- ❖ While respondents expected that the vast majority of residents would comply if they were informed, they were not as confident that lawn care contractors would follow the new regulations.
- ❖ The issue of tracking compliance among residents is a delicate balance between protecting the community on one hand and respecting the rights of individual property owners on the other. They hoped that a combination of subtle and direct intervention from neighbours would bring residential offenders into line. Some participants also believed that it could be necessary to call the Town to report repeat offenders, however they discouraged creating a special "snitch line" expressly for this purpose.
- ❖ First time residential offenders should be viewed as acting out of ignorance; the Town should send a registered letter informing the resident about the new regulation. Fines starting at \$150 and escalating upwards should only be used for repeat offenses.

- ❖ Initial bylaw enforcement tracking should focus on lawn care contractors – random spot checks of trucks and supplies were recommended. Offenders should be fined immediately; no exceptions should be permitted. Their license to operate in Markham should be revoked.

Education

- ❖ The introduction of Markham's new pesticide bylaw must be accompanied by an education program in order to ensure compliance. The Town is responsible for providing the necessary facts for the different target segments – residents, lawn care contractors and retailers.
- ❖ In order to be effective and take root across the entire community, the public education program should be conducted over a period of time. Respondents did not view it as a one-shot campaign. It should comprise the following:
 - » The launch campaign should focus on the intent (curtail use of harmful toxic pesticides) and rationale for the new bylaw (a public health issue) and provide a list of acceptable products/solutions for common problems (i.e. What Can I Buy in Stores?).
 - » Tips on natural and organic gardening are essential; the levels of uptake will likely differ across the Town. Community standards of the ideal lawn and garden can be expected to evolve in accordance with new environmental conditions, i.e. lower precipitation and warmer summers. However, most residents do not want to unduly deviate from Markham's pristine property maintenance standards.
- ❖ A variety of print and electronic communication channels will be needed in order to reach Markham's diverse population. Residents expect that there will be articles and notices in their weekly community newspaper, and notices delivered door-to-door. In addition the launch and follow-up campaign materials should be available on the Town's website. Posters creating awareness of the new bylaw should be mounted in key public location and brochures should be made available at community centres and libraries.
- ❖ In addition, it would appear that the majority of residents are willing to signal their endorsement of the bylaw by posting a sign declaring: Pesticide Free - Safe for all living things. This social marketing tool educates neighbours and helps create community-wide compliance.

