

# SHOULD ONTARIO REDUCE TOXINS - OR REDUCE RED TAPE?

## ENVIRONMENTALISTS UPSET THAT OPEN FOR BUSINESS BILL SCRAPS TOXICS REDUCTION ACT

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John Oudyk has seen a lot of heartache in 40 years of helping patients exposed to industrial toxins.

There was the woman who developed asthma from isocyanates in glue at work.

She was moved to a different department, but it was too late.

During a lunch date with her former co-workers in her old department she collapsed, unable to breathe. Transported to hospital, she nearly died.

There was the man who worked in Hamilton coke ovens. His dry cough and shortness of breath developed into mesothelioma, a cancer linked to the asbestos in his gloves and coat protecting him from workplace heat.

It killed him. He was in his 50s.

Oudyk, an occupational hygienist since 1979, has many more stories of Ontarians hurt by toxins, but he always held out hope that industry would one day come clean.

Which is why, when Ontario introduced its Toxics Reduction Act (TRA) in 2009, he was first in line to be trained as a licensed toxics planner.

It was part of the TRA's mission to provide certified planners to help businesses find ways to avoid using and creating toxic substances.

Oudyk was fuelled by optimism. Under the TRA, employers were required to submit reduction plans. While they weren't required to follow through, "at least they went through



Byron Johnson/Torstar

John Oudyk, an occupational hygienist since 1979, says Ontario's Toxics Reduction Act was a beautiful opportunity.

the thought exercise and the hope was they'd maybe see the light and economic advantages," Oudyk said.

But the rug was yanked out from under the program before it was fully rolled out. On April 3, the province announced it would be repealed effective Dec. 31, 2021 as part of the government's Bill 66 promise to cut red tape for business.

"The TRA was a beautiful opportunity," Oudyk said. "But none of the parties took advantage of it. It became a paper exercise."

According to the Canadian Environmental Law Association, Ontario's emissions of toxic substances to air, land, and water are some of the highest in North America.

"The province is home to the largest chemical

### A TOXIC DECISION

The provincial government is repealing the Toxics Reduction Act, axing a voluntary reduction program that empowered you to see what toxins are used in the industrial facilities in your neighbourhood - and what they planned to do to reduce them. A Toxic Decision?, a Torstar Community Brands multi-part special series, takes an in-depth look at the impacts of the act's repeal and the program's cancellation.

manufacturing industry in the country by far, with much denser populations," explains Peterborough environmental lawyer David McRobert.

"People in Ontario are exposed to the most toxins per capita, and probably more than most American states because federal and

To read the comprehensive Torstar Community Brands series, A Toxic Decision, go to [theifp.ca/toxins](http://theifp.ca/toxins)



state environmental protection standards are stronger."

Muhannad Malas, toxics program manager with Environmental Defence, says he is "deeply troubled" that Ontario withdrew the TRA at a time when health authorities around the world are sounding alarms over the dangers of pollution.

When the TRA was launched in 2010, modelled after a successful 30-year-old Massachusetts program, the idea was to encourage facilities to reduce exposure to cancer-causing and other harmful

chemicals.

The program provided an interactive map where citizens could search addresses or businesses to see what toxins were being used, created, released, disposed and recycled in their own communities - and find out what those businesses planned to do about it.

For 2018 data and onwards, facilities with existing toxics reduction plans will no longer be required to review them and facilities will no longer be required to develop new plans or report on their execution.

Industry leaders like the Chemical Industry Association of Canada hailed the move.

It has been lobbying against the TRA since its inception, saying the TRA duplicated what's already in place with the federal program and created an additional regulatory burden on industry, with no discernible benefit.

Criticism also came from toxic reduction planners who were frustrated by the process and felt they had little success in making significant inroads.

A quick look at the public documents show many of the industries that reported to the TRA had no intention of acting on reduction plans. In their submission to the ministry, some said the TRA should be axed.

The provincial government decided industry was right - the TRA was duplicative and a burden, and had to go. Besides, preliminary results showed minimal success - just a 0.04 per cent reduction overall in toxins.

But many organizations, environmentalists and health providers disagree. They argue the TRA was not given a fair chance.

While 40 per cent of the reporting facilities indicated they intended to implement at least one reduction strategy, the program was repealed too soon to see consistent results, they say.

What's more, 'next steps' in the program never saw light of day.

One of those next steps was to roll out a list of highly hazardous chemicals not addressed by the federal program, Malas says. There were also plans to inform consumers about chemical ingredients in products by implementing on-product labeling or other ways of ingredient disclosure, he says.

As for the federal and