

Councillor calls for new rules on dust mitigation, citing health concerns

Aurora is a growing community and construction is happening all around us, but one local Councillor is calling for greater awareness of the health impacts that cutting stones and pavers can have on health.

This week, Council is poised to sign off on a motion from Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim calling on Aurora to undertake an education campaign on the risks of cutting stones and pavers without proper precautions, and look at ways to mitigate dust from these construction projects and builds.

The cutting of stones and concrete pavers for interlock patios, driveways and other landscaping projects can release respirable crystalline silica into the air, said Councillor Kim in his motion, which was first introduced at the October 14 Committee of the Whole meeting. Prolonged or repeated exposure to silica dust is known to pose serious health risks to workers and the general public, including respiratory illnesses such as silicosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

The Town of Aurora, while not a regulatory authority or subject matter expert on silica dust mitigation, recognizes its responsibility to promote public health and safety through education and awareness. The Town's Bylaw Services team has acknowledged the importance of informing tradespeople, contractors, and residents about the risks associated with silica dust and the availability of safer cutting practices and protective equipment.

When the matter was discussed earlier this month, the motion received the broad support of Council, but Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she didn't want staff to reinvent the wheel on an education campaign, but draw upon existing resources to impart information to residents.

Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, told Council that the current Building Code doesn't regulate dust created by cutting concrete or performing masonry work but is covered through the Occupational Health and Safety Act under the Ministry of Labour.

He said, however, that his department occasionally receives complaints from residents who are complaining about another neighbour or builder cutting stone and creating dust, and when such complaints are received, the Town typically sends out inspectors or bylaw enforcement out there to investigate and advise them to perhaps use some water to keep the dust under control.

One such complaint that came her way, noted Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, was addressed by Bylaw, but she said an education initiative would be a good idea.

People don't understand how this can really damage their lungs and that includes people who are cutting, working for developers or contractors and they're hurting themselves and they don't even know it, she said.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo said that he too had a resident reach out to him with concerns over cutting.

No matter where the good information comes from, whichever level of government, this is an exercise in educating the public and companies on the appropriate use and the dangers of silica and its effects, he said. This is something that we should definitely be doing and I'll be supporting [the motion].

Councillor Kim said his motion was born out of concerns voiced to him by residents as well.

You'll see half a block that's inundated with dust and silica materials and that's the purpose of this motion, he said. This motion addresses a significant occupational and public health concern in our community. The risks associated with silica dust exposure during the cutting of stones and concrete pavers for interlock patios driveways and landscaping projects, a resident who has serious health concerns brought this to my attention earlier this year and many residents have commented on all the dust that floats in the air

when spring summer rolls in and people do their interlock driveways.

?This motion calls for the development and implementation of a public awareness campaign, collaboration with experts and organizations, and outreach to both professionals and residents undertaking DIY projects. It also asks staff to review our Clean Communities Bylaw for potential amendments regarding dust mitigation. By supporting this initiative, we can help ensure that those working in our community whether professionally or as homeowners or as bystanders are equipped with the knowledge and resources to protect themselves and others in the risk of silica dust exposure.?

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