Date: April 8, 2004

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation

FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT: Treated Wood in Playgrounds

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board receive this report for information.

POLICY

Although there is no specific Board policy applicable to the use of pressure-treated wood in children's playgrounds, a basic principle entrenched in the planning, use and maintenance of Park Board facilities is ensuring the safety of all users and Park Board employees. Moreover, the equipment and structures in Park Board playgrounds meet Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standards at the time of installation.

BACKGROUND

On January 27, 2003 the Board received an information report on the levels of arsenic residues near playgrounds. This report followed release of a study by Environmental Defense Canada suggesting the presence of high levels of arsenic in some park playgrounds.

At the time the Board was advised that Vancouver Coastal Health Authority would undertake a sample survey of playgrounds in Richmond/Vancouver and the North Shore. This report is attached as Appendix I.

DISCUSSION

In Vancouver parks, 13 % of park playgrounds were sampled and none of the playgrounds exceeded the Canadian Ministers of the Environment reference level of 12 parts per million (ppm), nor the B.C. Contaminated Sites regulation limit for residential/park use of 100 ppm.

Re-sampling of three sites identified by the Environmental Defense Canada study undertaken in

early 2003, could not replicate the results. The EDC samples apparently were taken from the native subsoil below the resilient surface around the playground. In most circumstances native soil is not likely to be accessible to children.

In the attached report the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority makes the following recommendations:

1. Given the voluntary removal (effective December 31, 2003) from the market of CCA-treated wood for use in playgrounds, playground providers should not be acquiring or installing any new CCA-wood playgrounds (i.e. from any remaining stock).

2. The planned replacement of CCA-treated wood equipment should continue in an orderly fashion as budgets permit.

3. Sand should continue to be topped up (with clean sand) to provide the recommended depth of resilient surface and to discourage any contact with native soil.

4. Alternate resilient surfaces (e.g. artificial mulch) should be evaluated as options to sand.

5. For new equipment acquisitions, some of the currently available alternates (ACQ or Copper Azole) do not appear to have the same drawbacks as CCA (i.e. they do not contain arsenic) and are currently available in manufactured playgrounds. Since these products do not have as long a history of use as CCA, we cannot yet conclude that their use is absolutely free of any health risks. Nevertheless, the ACQ product has received endorsements from the EPA as a suitable replacement treatment for CCA. Further study by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency and the EPA should confirm their safety profile".

The Board is following all these procedures as outlined in 1 - 4. With regard to new equipment, (item 5), all proposals and tender calls exclude wood as an acceptable material. Staff will be monitoring research on alternate wood preservatives. Replacement of existing wood components in playgrounds needing repair is with non-treated wood. Should research confirm the low risk presently assigned to these alternate treatments, wood may be reintroduced as a playground construction material. Staff would report back to the Board prior to such a change.

Prepared by:

Planning and Operations
Board of Parks & Recreation
Vancouver, B.C.
PR/vs