

Premika Ratnam
Chair, Play at the Park

April 4, 2007

Dear Premika Ratnam,

The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) is deeply concerned about public health and the environment and we recognize the important role that parks play in people's lives. To ensure that parks remain safe and healthy spaces, CAPE works to ban the cosmetic use of lawn and garden pesticides – which are especially detrimental to the health of children and pets – and we were instrumental in attaining the City of Toronto's pesticide ban in 2003.

Parks provide a place for people to develop a sense of community and to engage in an active lifestyle. The creation and protection of neighbourhood parks where children play is important to ensure that families have a convenient space to be active and for children to make friends and feel safe. It is also necessary to look at these spaces for seniors and the vulnerable, as well as other diverse park users, so that citizens can engage in recreational activities with comfort and ease.

We also recognize the benefits that pets gain from accessing parks. At the same time, we know that dog bites and dog attacks are a common reason for children to go to Emergency Rooms in hospitals and that unleashed dogs can be an intimidating presence in public spaces. Off-leash dogs could keep children, seniors and others away from a park that they might otherwise go to. Our urban environment must be planned and managed in such a way as to permit off-leash dogs without compromising the public's use of these green spaces.

We therefore support the need for enclosures for off-leash dogs in large parks and other open spaces. We also recommend that the limit on the number of dogs per dog walker be retained at the current level of three.

Many cities in North America are updating these standards and we ask that Toronto establish clear guidelines and processes to minimize conflict between dogs and people and to have higher levels of enforcement.

We live in a time when we cannot take our environment for granted and must exercise care in how we use our green spaces to ensure that we can advance and protect the public's right to use parks and sidewalks. Allowing increasing confrontations between off-leash dogs and the public could be a serious threat to the public's access to parks and sidewalks.

Thank you for ensuring that our parks remain safe environments for the public and for pets.

Sincerely,

Gideon Forman
Executive Director