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Councillors eye needles

Want review of program for addicts to keep streets and parks clean of infected gear

DEREK PUDDICOMBE

City Hall Bureau

Three councillors want the city to clean up its needle exchange program.

Concerned that needles used by drug addicts and provided by the city are being tossed in city parks and dropped on streets and private property, Orleans Coun. Bob Monette wants the city to review the program it shares with the province.

He also wants to make sure drug addicts who use the program aren't receiving more needles than the city's policy dictates, which is a one-for-one deal.

"The program is not working and needs to be fixed," said Monette. "I want a smart

exchange."

Unlike the crack pipe program that city council voted to scrap last summer, Monette and council colleagues Eli El-Chantiry and Shad Qadri can't vote to end the city's involvement in the program because it's legislated by the province. However, they agree a review is necessary.

"It protects the drug addicts but it's forgetting about the general population," he said.

Monette and El-Chantiry were bothered after the *Sun* reported late last December that two young Ottawa girls were inadvertently stuck by a dirty needle they found on the sidewalk outside their Ottawa

home.

El-Chantiry also wants to make sure the city is only handing out one needle for every needle received back from a user.



EL-CHANTIRY
City accountable

"We have to make sure the city is accountable and the needles don't end up in somebody's back yard," he said.

El-Chantiry said he has been told some residents have found needles stuck in trees placed so the needle portion is sticking out. Monette has a photo of a needle that has been positioned in the ground with the sharp end sticking up.

The city policy says that the program will provide users

"with an adequate amount of sterile needles to meet their requirements for safe injecting" and "no client will be refused sterile needles on the basis that they do not have any used needles to exchange."

The city doesn't enforce a one-to-one exchange but does encourage clients to return used needles when they receive new ones and the "number of needles given to clients without any for exchange will be based on a professional assessment."

When city staff doesn't receive a used needle for a new one they provide information on how to properly dispose needles and the impact that improperly discarded needles have on neighbourhoods. The city also

makes biohazard containers available to users.

The concept of a one-for-one exchange doesn't work for Somerset Coun. Diane Holmes because provinces have tried it and found it ineffective.

'Significant number'

"We need to provide a significant number of needles," said Holmes, or the result will be numerous drug users hanging around clinics every two hours to get a new needle.

She does agree the city needs to do a better job at cleaning up discarded needles but says more money from the province is required to do it.

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Astronauts prep for stay

MONTREAL — Canadian astronaut Bob Thirsk will have to do a lot of exercise when he settles in for an extended stay on board the International Space Station next year.

Thirsk and Julie Payette will be the next Canadians to visit the space station and they will

Payette's second trip in space — she was aboard *Discovery* in 1999.

During her mission, Payette and the space station crew will help install the remaining components of the Kibo laboratory of JAXA, the Japanese space agency.

