

Requests for Reconsideration of Library Materials – 2010 Annual Report

Date:	February 2, 2011
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the process for dealing with requests for the reconsideration of materials in the Library's collections and to provide a summary of the nine complaints received in 2010.

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive the *Requests for Reconsideration of Library Materials – 2010 Annual Report* for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact arising from the information in this report.

The Director, Finance and Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and is in agreement with it.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Library provides a process for members of the public to identify concerns about books and other material in the Library's collection. These customer complaints are considered within the context of the *Materials Selection Policy* and the principles of intellectual freedom, both of which were approved by the Board at its meeting on June 26, 2000, with a revision of the policy being approved at the December 10, 2007 meeting. The relevant section of the policy is restated here.

The Library believes that a vital society encourages members of its community to actively participate in an open exchange of ideas and opinions. Material selectors consequently strive to provide the widest possible range of resources within Toronto Public Library collections.

The content or manner of expressing ideas in material that is purposely selected to fill the needs of some library users, may, on occasion, be considered to be offensive by other library users. The Library recognizes the right of any individual or group to reject library material for personal use, but does not accord to any individual or group the right to restrict the freedom of others to make use of that same material.

Library users who object to materials located in a library collection are asked to complete a written request for reconsideration of the materials. Request forms are available for this purpose at local Library branches.

The procedures for the reconsideration of library materials are intended to ensure that the concerns of the customer are dealt with in a timely manner and with sensitivity. Typically, complaints are received at the branch level. Staff has the opportunity to discuss the customer's concerns with them and to provide them with a copy of the *Materials Selection Policy*. This discussion often addresses the customer's concerns and no further action is required. Customers wishing to pursue the complaint fill out a form detailing their concerns, and this form is sent to the Collections Development Manager, who forwards it to the Materials Review Committee. A letter of acknowledgement is sent to the customer explaining the process.

The Materials Review Committee is a standing committee chaired by a manager with a rotating membership made up of experienced public service librarians. They share a mixture of expertise on adult, teen and children's materials, but may call in other experts; for example, subject or language specialists, as needed. The Committee researches the disputed title by considering reviews, the author's reputation, coverage of the subject in the collection, its popularity, historical importance, etc., all within the context of the *Materials Selection Policy*. The decision on the disposition of the item is communicated in writing to the customer by the City Librarian.

COMMENTS

Challenges to titles in the collection received by the Materials Review Committee in 2010 and the actions taken by the Library are listed in Attachment 1.

There were complaints about nine titles. All were in English: four adult books, one adult magazine article, one video, one teen book, and two children's books. Three of the four adult books, the teen book, the magazine and the video were retained in the collection. Both children's books were retained; one was transferred to the adult collection because the historical context would not be understood by the children's age group for whom it is intended. The adult book that was withdrawn from the collection contained out-of-date, misleading and unreliable information.

In general, the volume of complaints received relative to the population served is very low, reflecting the Toronto public's appreciation of the breadth of TPL's collection and its understanding of the application of intellectual freedom in a library setting.

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SIGNATURE

Jane Pyper
City Librarian

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Materials Review Committee – Reconsideration of Materials Summary
– 2010