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Reducing traffic pollution saves lives

Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, today released a new report outlining the extent to which serious illness and premature death is linked to traffic-related air pollution .

In 2004, Toronto Public Health conducted a study that linked overall air pollution to 1,700 premature deaths each year. This new report, *Air Pollution Burden of Illness from Traffic in Toronto*, shows that 440 of these deaths are associated with air pollution generated specifically from vehicle traffic.

The report outlines the significant burden of illness and health-related costs associated with current levels of smog-generating pollutants, greenhouse gases and air toxics emitted by vehicles and demonstrates the potential to improve health and reduce health care costs by reducing vehicle use and emissions.

"For the first time in Ontario, we have isolated the health impacts of vehicle emissions, and can demonstrate the potential health benefits of moving to a more sustainable transportation system," said Dr. McKeown. "A 30 per cent reduction in motor vehicle emissions in Toronto could save nearly 200 lives a year and significantly reduce hospitalization and illness, and associated economic impacts."

The City made a commitment to improving transportation when Council passed the report *Sustainable Transportation Initiatives: Short-term Proposals* last month. "We are committed to improving the way people travel in Toronto," said Gary Welsh, General Manager, Transportation Services. "This report underscores the need to implement policies that promote walking, cycling and public transit."

Dr. Janice Willett, President of the Ontario Medical Association, welcomed news of the study. "There is no longer a debate about the health impact of polluted air, but as more is learned about the impact of specific pollution sources we are in a better position to champion clean air policies," said Dr. Willett. "This important work on the impact of vehicle emissions will ultimately benefit our patients."

The report will be presented to the Board of Health at its November 12 meeting at City Hall. Recommendations in the report call on City Council to ensure that health impacts are considered when assessing policy options to enhance public transit and reduce vehicle emissions.

The report also recommends a shift from motor vehicles to more sustainable transportation solutions that give priority to pedestrians, cyclists and transit users.

The Board of Health report, including a technical summary, is posted at www.toronto.ca/health.

See over...

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