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February 5, 2008

The Honourable Gerry Phillips
Minister of Energy
900 Bay Street, 4th Floor
Hearst Block
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2E1

Dear Mr. Phillips,

At its meeting of January 21, 2008, the Board of Health considered the report *US Court Decision on Transboundary Air Pollution*. The report outlines the benefits to air quality in Toronto that should result from the requirement of American Electric Power, a major electric utility in the United States, to substantially reduce emissions from its coal-fired power plants. The report is available from <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-9849.pdf>.

During the deliberations on this report, the Board of Health learned that Ontario is generating a surplus of power. According to Ontario's Independent Electricity System Operator, in 2006, Ontario produced more power than it required for the first time, and exported 20% of power produced to the United States.

As you are aware, coal is one source of power generating capacity in the province. Coal-fired power plants produce air pollutants, including sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, which adversely affect the health of Toronto's residents. In 2005 the Ministry of Energy released a study indicating that coal-fired power contributes to 668 premature deaths, 928 hospital admissions, 1,100 emergency room visits and 333,660 minor illnesses such as headaches, coughing and other respiratory symptoms per year in Ontario.

The biggest coal-fired power plant in Ontario is Nanticoke, which is located upwind of Toronto, adversely affecting air quality in the city. Reducing and eliminating emissions should lead to improvements in Toronto's air quality, diminish the frequency and severity of smog episodes, and reduce the health impact of air pollution in Toronto.

By regulating a phase-out of Ontario's coal-fired power plants by 2014, the Ontario government has indicated its commitment to cleaner and healthier air in the province. Health benefits could emerge even sooner if coal is phased out faster. The Ontario Power Authority (OPA)'s Integrated Power System Plan forecasts that by 2010, Ontario's power generation capacity could meet peak demand even without using coal-fired power generation. Yet, an initial reduction in Ontario's generating capacity from coal is not planned until 2011.

Current efforts in Ontario to provide access to less polluting power supplies were initiated with a view to improving health. In 2005, the provincial minister of energy, the honourable Dwight Duncan, said “we must do everything we can to improve the quality of our air and the health of our citizens”.

For maximum health benefits to be realized, we should strive to decrease emissions as much as possible and as soon as less polluting sources of power become available. Some of this gain could be reversed if electricity exported from Ontario comes from coal-fired plants. Therefore, the Toronto Board of Health requests that you consider a ban on the export of coal-fired power from Ontario, except during emergencies.

Sincerely,

Original signed by Dr. David McKeown

David McKeown, MDCM, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health