

June 6, 2005

Study shows impacts of extreme weather and smog; Medical Officer of Health calls for action

Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, released a study today showing the combined impact of extreme weather and air pollution in four Canadian cities over a 46-year period.

The study found that extreme heat and cold temperatures and air pollution were associated with premature mortality in all four cities. About 80% of this premature mortality was associated with smog and 20% with extreme heat and cold.

In Toronto, in an average year during the period, 120 premature deaths were heat-related, 105 were cold related and 822 were related to acute exposure to five common smog pollutants.

Dr. McKeown called on the federal government to take action on both air quality and extreme heat events. "This study confirms the significance of air pollution as a major risk factor leading to early deaths. And extreme heat is very serious because with global warming, premature mortality will increase unless steps are taken to protect at-risk populations."

The report to the Board of Health recommends the creation of a national Heat Warning system that takes account of the combined effects of smog and extreme heat. "Heat warning systems and response measures can save lives," said Dr. McKeown. Toronto has had such a response system in place since 2000, with the Red Cross and community partners providing support to at-risk populations.

The report also calls on the federal government to focus on mandatory rather than voluntary measures to meet Kyoto Protocol targets reductions in smog and greenhouse gases.

Dr. McKeown also declared the city's first Heat Alert for 2005 today. This occurs as Toronto is entering day five of a smog advisory declared by the Ministry of the Environment.

For more information on the research study or the Heat Alert, visit the City's web site at www.toronto.ca/health.

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