

Community & Neighbourhood Services
Eric Gam, Commissioner

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April 28, 2003

The Honourable David Young
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
17th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto ON M5G 2E5

Dear Minister Young:

Re: Amendment of building codes to reduce hot tap water temperatures in homes

This letter is in support of the proposed changes under public review to sections 9.31.6 and 7.6.1.1 (5) of the Ontario Building Code to safeguard domestic hot tap water temperatures at 49°C. Adoption of these proposed code changes is an important step to reducing hot tap water burn injuries in homes. There is some evidence to suggest that by reducing hot tap water temperatures to 49°C, the incidence and severity of scald burn injuries could be reduced by up to 50%.

Toronto Public Health has a mandate to prevent injuries for all those who live, work and play in the City of Toronto.

The proposed amendments will provide important safeguards for Ontario's citizens, especially children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities. Severe scald burns can cause life long disability and death because water in homes is unnecessarily hot. Currently, hot water temperature in Canadian homes is typically set at 60°C. This is the maximum domestic storage temperature allowed under the current Ontario Building Code. When exposed to water of this temperature, human skin will burn in one to five seconds; children's skin burns more quickly. These burn injuries are both predictable and preventable.

Over 300 children, elderly people and people with disabilities are treated in hospitals each year in Canada for hot tap water scalds. Data from the Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program (CHIRPP) indicates that scald burn injuries due to hot tap water account for approximately 7% of all scald burns. Children under five years of age account for three-quarters of all tap water scalds, with children less than two years of age sustaining more than two-thirds of these injuries.

Some infection control experts have raised concerns regarding a reduction in hot water temperature and the risk of legionella infection in high-risk populations (e.g. persons with immune compromising conditions). I support the recommendation from Health Canada and the

Community and Hospital Infection Control Association – Canada that a “public education campaign” regarding the prevention of hot water scalds should include messages about prevention of legionellosis.

Health Canada has also identified a concern regarding the possible release of carbon monoxide into a home when there is a reduction in domestic hot water pre-set temperatures. I support Health Canada’s recommendation that this concern be addressed by the plumbing industry prior to implementing a reduction in pre-set water temperatures.

I urge the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to adopt the proposed technical changes in the Ontario Building Code to protect the public health and safety of those most at risk for hot tap water injuries – our children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sheela V. Basrur
Medical Officer of Health

Copy:

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