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Introduction:
My name is Tanya Gulliver and I am on the Management Team of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee[1]. For the past year I have been closely following the issue of heat emergencies including looking at Toronto's Hot Weather Response Plan as part of the Maytree Foundation's Public Policy Institute, and leading a project on heat for the students I teach at Ryerson in the Homelessness in Canadian Society course.

TDRC is pleased to see that Public Health is taking some important steps on the issue of heat emergencies, but we believe that the items outlined in today's staff report don't go far enough to address the dire need that exists in this City for vulnerable people. There is a lot of work that still needs to be done including the commitment of more resources and staff time.

Background:
Developing and implementing a comprehensive response to hot weather days within the City of Toronto is critical. People living in marginalized housing situations, the elderly, the infirm, shut-ins, homeless people and people on psychiatric medications are at increased risk of falling ill or even dying from extreme hot weather[2]. As you are aware, Toronto Public Health estimates that approximately 120 people die every year from heat and smog related illnesses.[3] In 2005, the extreme hot weather –with 26 heat alert days registered - led to several deaths including that of Richard Howell, a resident of a rooming house in Parkdale.[4] Climatologists are predicting that the summer of 2007 will be the hottest on record; something I am sure we will hear most years from now on. The latest "probabilistic forecast" from Environment Canada for the three months April to June (issued on April 1, 2007) predicts a 60% probability that temperatures in the late spring / early summer will be higher than normal.[5]

[1] http://www.tdrc.net – TDRC is a homeless advocacy organization that works to improve the situation of homeless people in Toronto and across Canada, including lobbying for a fully-funded, adequate, National Housing Strategy.
[2] http://www.toronto.ca/health/beatheat_qa.htm
[3] http://www.toronto.ca/health/beatheat_qa.htm
[4] A coroner's inquest was requested by the Medical Officer of Health and the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC). The Coroner's office, in conversations with the TDRC in the summer of 2006, refused to provide a denial in writing, but verbally stated that the Coroner sees "no value" in holding an inquest.
[5] http://weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca/saisons/index_e.html#proba

Following that deadly summer of 2005, Toronto revised the existing heat alert plan[6] and created a detailed Hot Weather Response plan[7] and an Urban Heat Island Mitigation Strategy[8]. These plans, while well intentioned, are inadequate and have not been fully implemented. For example, discussions with staff and councillors in the summer of 2006 led to the discovery that no staff person had been designated to work on the implementation of the Urban Heat Island Mitigation Strategy[9] so nothing has been done to date, despite the fact that the plan was approved at the July 2005 Council meeting. This plan addresses mid-range and long-term solutions to the impact of the urban heat footprint on the environment. These are necessary steps if we want to lower the overall impact of climate change and avoid a summer of 1995 like Chicago had when over 600 people perished[10], or more dramatically, the summer of 2003 when nearly 15000 people died in France[11].

During 2006 there were 17 heat emergencies[12]; nine heat alert days[13] and eight extreme heat alert days[14]. The formula the City uses to determine a heat alert or extreme heat alert is complicated[15], and doesn't always reflect the reality of people's living conditions[16]. The response in terms of service provision is inadequate at best, and potentially life threatening through lack of adequate opportunities for people to escape the heat.

It is critical that this issue be addressed in advance of the summer of 2007. Even mid-April is a little late – this needs to become part of the annual winter planning. Let's talk about winter in the summer, and summer in the winter to ensure sufficient time to implement needed strategies. The first heat alert last year was called by the end of

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[6] http://www.toronto.ca/health/beatheat_program.htm

[7] The plan was revised again in April 2006.
http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/committees/hl/hl060227/it013.pdf

[8] Urban Heat Island refers to the fact that a large urban centre is significantly warmer (year round) than the surrounding countryside. Whether the impact of large urban areas contributes to the overall global warming issue remains under debate, but there are definite consequences within the cities themselves as temperatures may be 2-10◦C warmer than surrounding areas. With the United Nations estimating that for the first time ever more than 50% of the world's population will live in urban areas this is an issue that needs to be monitored.

[9] More details on the City of Toronto's plan can be found at http://tdrc.net/urbanheatocouncil2005.pdf

[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Heat_Wave_of_1995

[11] http://www.usatoday.com/weather/news/2003-09-25-france-heat_x.htm

[12] TDRC uses the term "heat emergency" to emphasize the urgency of these days. The City of Toronto uses heat alert and extreme heat alert only. http://www.toronto.ca/health/heat_stats.htm

[13] During a Heat Alert, the Heat-Health System forecasts the likelihood of premature deaths exceeding 65 per cent based on an oppressive air mass. http://www.toronto.ca/health/heat_notification.htm

[14]During an Extreme Heat Alert, the Heat-Health System forecasts the likelihood of premature deaths exceeding 90 per cent based on an oppressive air mass. http://www.toronto.ca/health/heat_notification.htm

[15] http://www.toronto.ca/health/heat_notification.htm

[16] Many people live in inadequate housing conditions without air conditioning, windows that don't open properly, poor air circulation and little ventilation.

May, this doesn't leave a lot of time to develop a proper response, leading to the potential for more heat related complications, and potentially more deaths.

Toronto has some key resources that need to be fully engaged - including the Toronto Atmospheric Fund and Municipal Licensing and Standards. Immediately ahead on the horizon is the Climate Change Action Forum[17] on April 29. The Board of Health should be urging resources to be committed and actions to come out of these declarations and forums, and public health staff should be seconded to work with others on these initiatives.

Cooling Resource Support:
The City is failing to work diligently to increase access of high risk people to cooling resource support. This includes access to air conditioners, proactive support to change the physical plant conditions that increase heat risk in substandard and older housing being used by poor communities. The Board of Health report only makes an apology in this area. It does not set any real direction for making change in this area. This is a big gap and it will certainly lead to tragedy down the road.

Maximum Temperature Bylaw:
Tied in with this is the desperate need for a maximum temperature by-law. While we understand that the staff report says that "a maximum heat standard can be more easily applied to new residential buildings" we feel that it is imperative that city work with other levels of government, and housing providers to implement a heat maximum in all housing.

The proposed bylaw is intended to mirror the existing minimum temperature bylaw that requires landlords to ensure that there is sufficient heat during the cold winter months. The bylaw can be tied to city-administered housing rehabilitation and renovation programs, including the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, in order to ensure that landlords get the financial resources to meet the new standards. A maximum temperature bylaw will cause some concern among landlords, just as the increased fire safety standards after ten people died in the Rupert Hotel rooming house in 1989 caused landlords to express concern. However, in the early 1990s, the City of Toronto convened a rooming house task force that included tenants, housing providers, landlords, city officials and others to look at the practical and financial issues involved in implementing the new standards. Fire safety was not negotiable - something available only to higher income Torontonians. What was negotiable were the strategies required to meet the new standards. The same applies to killer heat in

[17] Info on the Climate Change Action Forum is at: http://www.toronto.ca/changeisintheair/involved.htm

housing: Life safety for tenants is not negotiable, but the process of achieving the basic standards in life safety can be achieved through a collaborative process.

Cool Toronto:
In the summer of 2006, the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee developed a "Three Point Plan to Cool Toronto."[18] This plan includes immediate, short-term, and middle-term solutions such as a green/white roofs program[19], immediate provision of TTC tokens to at-risk groups, and the development of a fan/air conditioner loan program. This plan has been endorsed by more than 15 organizations including the Registered Nursing Association of Ontario, the Toronto Environmental Alliance and the Association of Community Health Centres.

In the fall of 2006 a group of Ryerson students studying "Homelessness in Canadian Society" undertook very basic survey of community agencies' response to heat alerts. While the students lacked the necessary tools, time, knowledge and authority to conduct a detailed survey, basic information showed that surveyed agencies felt ill-equipped to deal with extreme heat emergencies.[20] The agencies indicated that they needed more support and funding from the municipality to cope with the added demands of heat alert and extreme heat alert days. This proves a role for the City of Toronto in providing a response to heat emergencies.

Additional research has been undertaken to examine heat response plans in other countries. While cities and countries develop responses best suited to their locales, there are commonalities and many of these are addressed in the Cool Toronto plan.

Cooling Centres:
Last year we pointed out that there was no cooling centre in Scarborough. The planned addition of a Scarborough cooling centre is a step in the right direction but it doesn't go far enough. Cooling centres need to be located in every neighbourhood in the city. Accessible centrally located services are essential to helping prevent heat-

[18] http://tdrc.net/cooltoronto2006.doc (Appendix A)
[19] "A green roof system is an extension of the existing roof which involves a high quality water proofing and root repellant system, a drainage system, filter cloth, a lightweight growing medium and plants." http://www.greenroofs.org/
White roofs < http://www.boingboing.net/2004/04/16/white_roofs_cut_airc.html> don't heat up as much as standard roofing materials and can lower the internal temperature of a building, reducing air conditioner usage in the summer by as much as 40%
[20] Appendix B

related illnesses and deaths.[21] We are not encouraged by the over reliance of the civic "cooling centres" as the best option, as these are mostly not accessible or welcoming to high need people. The lack of resources provided by them limited their use and effectiveness.

The only 24 hour cooling centre is located at Metro Hall. While that location may be increasingly gaining a residential population they are primarily housed in condos and have little or no need for a cooling centre. Etobicoke, East York and North York civic centres face a similar location problem. Only North York is in an easily accessible location. We feel that cooling centres should be operated in buildings, or areas of buildings that are easily accessible and allow for the provision of privacy. Last year for example, patrons were refused cots are Metro Hall during the day because it was "primarily a place of business".

We encourage local, ward cooling centres to be supported with resources extending beyond heat safety information. They should provide water, high protein snacks and a supportive atmosphere that will foster further linkages with high-needs people living in their vicinity. These centres can be used to build support links with other local social service providers. (We saw this in fact happen, when it was supported during cold weather response conditions). These sites should be higher profile cooling centre services. They can fulfill this role by anchoring other cooling resources operating in the surrounding ward.

Transportation and TTC:
Cooling centres and even cooling places are sometimes difficult for people to reach. Last year there was confusion over who would drive people to a cooling centre. The staff report says that no one requested transportation to a cooling centre from the Red Cross. This is not true. We're aware of incidents where staff trying to get clients to a cooling centre were told by the Red Cross information line staff to call the Street Helpline, while Street Helpline redirected them back to the Red Cross.

Additionally, while 2400 tokens sounds like a lot, it's not. Tokens were distributed to 29 drop-ins. If they were only used on Extreme Heat Alert days, this amounts to 10

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[21] http://www.uchospitals.edu/news/2006/20060802-heat-wave.html Christopher Browning, associate professor of sociology at Ohio State University, released a study last year that showed that "neighborhoods with the highest mortality rates were less likely to have stores or other businesses where older people felt comfortable going to, even in the worst heat. They stayed bunkered in their apartments where they were most at risk for heat-related illnesses that led to death."

tokens per agency per extreme heat alert day. However, on heat alert days (not extreme) there was still a need for clients to access cool places. In that case, the tokens amount to less than 5 per agency, per heat event. Tokens were not distributed until August last year. It is critical that a sufficient supply of tokens be given to drop-in centres, in the month of May.

Drop-ins / Outreach / Safety Networks:
Last year, the Hot Weather program at the Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre (PARC) produced some interesting experiences that could be built upon to produce improved, neighbourhood based heat response. The service combination of a drop-in cooling space with outreach response encouraged work which identified and recorded people facing elevated heat risk. Even with limited (weekend based) services, the approach built a type of heat registry that could be used to monitor folks as the summer progressed or heat conditions worsened.

This work reassured folks living in substandard conditions. It was very obvious that connections built on this trust were expansive. At-risk people identified other at-risk people. Giving comfort resources assisted this process (fans, food, TTC etc), helping PARC to open doors that might have remained closed otherwise. And certainly the most important component of setting up this heat registry was their on-site presence, inspecting heat risk housing sites and providing personal assistance from there. We do not think anyone should be deceived that existing service /support connections will cover the territory inhabited by isolated and at-risk people. Community resources are stretched and this type of problem has only been increasing over the years.

If resourced, it is very possible to graft heat response on to existing peer support networks functioning in high risk neighbourhoods. Many of these are based in drop-in type services. Peer networks can play a role in getting information out to high risk sites as well as linking community support personnel to these sites so that heat-related intervention work can be undertaken. Peer leaders can have meaningful involvement in this work if it is resourced.

An investment to build this type of approach would ultimately pay off and become a significant asset in the event of any extended period of heat emergency. In fact this approach is probably the only really sustainable pathway for heat response.

PARC's experience in using one outreach worker was onerous for the staff involved. In fact they got sick (heat stroke) at one point and it was very difficult work at the best of times. Creating a framework for this work that would increase neighbourhood response capacity would be a much better and more effective way to go in the long term.

Of course this would require funding that would not be restricted to weekend period but could be used with flexibility during heat risk and emergency heat risk conditions.

We have developed a list of recommendations for actions that we think are needed to improve Toronto's response to heat emergencies.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend a more intensive and long term heat response planning process. The City of Toronto's recent experiences with hot weather fluctuations in the context of global warming has raised the bar on emergency planning approaches. It is important to stop limiting this process and create workable plan options for use during hot weather emergency periods. This plan should be responsive to mortality risk variables (known to increase with the frequency and pattern of emergency hot weather days).

2. We recommend linking the hot weather response plan to the City of Toronto's broader environmental and climate change agenda. This not only will help to ensure that more resources are available, but it will also get some political profile and momentum.

3. Currently, the Hot Weather Response Team meets in April and October only. We recommend a mid-summer assessment of what is occurring throughout the City during the hot weather period. This would set direction for Shelter Housing, Emergency Planning, BOH representatives and community providers to convene and review what is taking place, how well it is working and what is not working.

4. We recommend ward based "cooling centres" based in City operated recreation / community centres. These should be identified on a ward-by-ward across the City of Toronto. These "ward cooling centres" can be used as bases to coordinate heat response and heat prevention communications within the ward. Working to develop this type of strategically disbursed cooling centre support system is lead-in work that will pay off in the event of any extended heat emergency period. It is important to implement a heat prevention strategy that builds a foundation for more intensive support when it is needed. We are failing to take these steps right now and this will have serious consequences in the future.

5. Increase funding to permit expanded drop-in based heat / cooling support response. This should include expansion of hours over weekend period but also the capacity to increase service hours and supports during any heat emergency period.

6. Provide heat response funding that will support the development of local heat registries and local heat safety networks. This type of approach should use both volunteers and peer employment components. It can be created via drop-in programs as well as other local community agencies supporting peer support activities. This builds a long term approach to the issue of community neighbourhood safety in the face of environmental risk. The involvement of local people in coordination heat prevention activity can be used to ramp up outreach connections in high need neighbourhoods; supporting the linkage of high need people to skilled community outreach providers able to deliver heat crisis intervention support.

7. Last year the first heat alert was issued on May 29th. To improve service delivery and to make users aware that the drop-in hours have expanded before any heat emergency occurs we recommend having the extended drop-in hours begin on May 12th or May 19th.

8. An increased number of TTC tickets should be made available to drop-ins and other services, well in advance of any potential hot weather.

9. We recommend that consultation with tenants, housing providers and advocates be part of the process of the development of a maximum temperature bylaw.