

June 28, 2003

Hello, Councillor Moise, Dr. de Villa and Board of Health members,

Re: HL5.1 - Healthy Summer - Toronto Public Health's work to support summer activities

I believe my comments are relative with respect to the role of TPH and its environmental responsibilities.

We are in the midst of an air quality emergency that is having worrisome outcomes.

When, what I think was, the first poor air quality alert due to northern Ontario and Quebec fires impacted Toronto June 6 I was flying to the Maritimes so missed the impact.

However, I did some tweeting alerts about it and to be honest I presumed the public health risk was such that proper 'clean air' 24/7 respites would open to accommodate people in need – both unhoused and poorly housed people. This situation appeared then to be province wide.

I thought multiple Ontario public health units would act, and at minimum Toronto.

I expected the province and the federal gov't to provide both recommendations and funding for this.

This is a historic and frightening situation with incredibly serious health outcomes.

Fast forward to today.

First, I want to reiterate what you have heard over and over - the shelter system is full. I spoke to three outreach workers yesterday (nurses and a social worker), all who could not access a shelter bed for a client via Central Intake. They faced the same dilemma trying to access a tent. This amid a downpour. There were no tents to be found.

Today (June 28), the situation is horrible - the air is thick and grey and it's humid. Unhoused people and those without good air quality such as rooming houses should have some welcoming, supportive, clean air venue to go to. There should be food, activities to pass the time and staff including a nurse or physician.

The city's media release below continues to emphasize that the existing shelter system and the city's heat relief plan suffice. They do not. The latter is not 24/7 and does not provide health care or any staffing particular to the needs in this situation.

<https://www.toronto.ca/news/toronto-public-health-encouraging-residents-to-follow-canadas-air-quality-health-index-city-of-toronto-adjusts-some-programming/>

On June 29 the Toronto Star reported Toronto has the worst air quality in the world due to the fires.

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2023/06/28/torontos-air-quality-is-among-the-worst-in-the-world-again-due-to-wildfire-smoke.html>

You and your team are the public health experts and this air quality emergency, which is predicted to be intermittent all summer, needs to be elevated at City Hall. In fact, I believe it is so urgent that Mayor elect Chow should be briefed.

The public needs more information and I urge you and city department leads to hold a media and public briefing and in the short-term open clean air respite sites for people in need of a reprieve from the smoke.

Sincerely,

Cathy Crowe, C.M.  
long-time street nurse and  
Visiting Practitioner, Department of Politics and Public Administration  
Toronto Metropolitan University