

Air Quality in Waterloo Region

What is the impact of poor air quality on the health of our community?

The amount of time our local air quality is in the range of impacting health has grown in recent years. We know that air pollution is harmful to all of us. But did you know that when you add up all of those who are particularly vulnerable to air pollution it comes to over **one third** of the members of our community? They include:

- children ages 0-18 because their lungs are developing
- seniors over 65
- those with cardiovascular and respiratory conditions.

Healthy people who spend a lot of time out doors working or exercising or who live in heavily polluted areas are also particularly at risk.

(Region of Waterloo Public health, "A Glance at Outdoor Air Quality and Human Health in Waterloo Region" June 2005.)

We know that air quality affects people with chronic respiratory conditions. But did you know that other health conditions which are particularly negatively affected by exposure to air pollution are:

- Heart diseases and constriction of arteries
- Lung cancer
- Lung function and growth in children and adolescents
- Pregnancy outcomes (pre-term birth, low birth weights)
- Diabetes

(Region of Waterloo Public health, "A Glance at Outdoor Air Quality and Human Health in Waterloo Region" June 2005.)

In 2005 in Waterloo Region, it is estimated that air pollution resulted in:

- 200 premature deaths
- 660 hospital admissions
- 2250 emergency room visits
- 1.24 million minor illness days
- \$19.9 million in health care costs
- \$16.01 million in lost productivity
- Total dollar costs to the community of \$36 million

Considering predicted population growth in this area, these premature deaths are expected to grow to 350 in 20 years if there are no improvements in air quality.

(Ontario Medical Association, **Illness Cost of Air Pollution Report**, June 2005.

<http://www.oma.org/phealth/smogmain.htm>)

Why is it happening?

While some of our air pollution comes from outside of our community, we **can** have a significant impact on the quality of air in our community. In fact, one of the biggest local contributors to air pollution is tailpipe emissions from automobiles on our streets and highways.

What can we do?

Reducing idling, carpooling or car sharing, taking transit, cycling or walking instead of driving a car, van or truck can all help to reduce local emissions.

For example, during this year's annual Commuter Challenge event, 2,059 individuals left their single occupancy vehicles at home at least once and commuted 134,592 km. to work. This translates into a total of 33,653 kg of harmful emissions that were kept out of our air during the week-long event. Imagine the difference if more people consistently used alternate forms of transportation.

Let's elect municipal and regional candidates who will advocate for improved air quality as they make decisions about how our communities will grow in the future! Below are some questions you could ask candidates.

1. Given the impact of cars on air quality and health, what is your position on creating communities which are less dependent on cars and what policies would you implement?
2. Given the impact of cars on air quality and health, what obstacles would you need to overcome in this community to reduce car dependence? How would you get the public on side?
3. What is your position on a rapid transit or light rail rapid transit system?
4. How high would you place reduction of air pollution on your list of priorities and what strategies might you advocate to reduce air pollution?

Did you know?

"If every household in Canada replaced just one regular light bulb with an Energy Star-qualified compact fluorescent one, the reduction in pollution would be like taking 66,000 cars off Canadian roads." Dec. 6, 2005 Canadian Medical Association Journal.

Websites with helpful tips or ideas

- www.reepwaterlooregion.ca Residential Energy Efficiency Project
- www.peoplescar.org People's Car
- www.ireduce.ca One-tone Challenge Waterloo Region
- www.cpha.ca/cleanair Canadian Public Health Association
- http://www.kitchener.ca/pdf/air_quality_kitchener.pdf citizen's report on Air Quality
- <http://www.activeliving.ca/english/PolicyWatch/Upload/Kitchener%20Adopt%20Pedestrian%20Charter.doc> Kitchener's Pedestrian Charter
- www.ecoactionteams.ca
- www.earthcharter.org

May you breathe well and may we create a healthier community!

Distributed by Waterloo Region Healthy Communities Coalition.
www.waterlooregion.org/healthy/coalition