



Public Health
Santé publique
SUDBURY & DISTRICTS

October 16, 2023

VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Minister David Piccini
Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks
5th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Piccini:

Re: Calls for expansion of outdoor air quality monitoring stations and the Air Quality Health Index across Northern Ontario

Expanding air quality monitoring stations across Northern Ontario, to provide comprehensive data to inform the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI), is needed now more than ever.

With climate change, wildfire is an increasing risk, particularly in Northern Ontario. Exposure to wildfire smoke can cause health impacts including headaches, cough, dizziness, chest pains, shortness of breath, asthma attacks and irregular heart beat¹. Some people are at higher risk of health problems when exposed to wildfire smoke, including older adults, pregnant people, people who smoke, infants and young children, people working or exercising outdoors and people with existing illnesses or chronic health conditions².

The AQHI is a tool for Ontarians to be informed of the health risks from local air pollution and take recommended actions to protect their health³. However, many northern Ontario communities do not have local outdoor air monitoring stations and therefore do not benefit from the AQHI.

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At its meeting on September 21, 2023, the Board of Health carried the following resolution #50-23:

WHEREAS according to recent research, climate change in Ontario is expected to increase the number of wildfires caused by human activity and by lightening by 20% and 62%, respectively, between the periods of 1975-1990 and 2020-2040, and it is expected that the increases will be even greater in parts of Northern Ontario; and

WHEREAS wildfire smoke can impact air quality and cause health effects hundreds of kilometers from the fire zone; and

WHEREAS many northern Ontario communities do not have local outdoor air monitoring stations and therefore do not benefit from the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI), a tool for Ontarians to be informed of the health risks from local air pollution and take recommended actions to protect their health; and

WHEREAS there is only one air quality monitoring station within Sudbury and districts that provides data for the AQHI, being one of only five stations across Northern Ontario; and

WHEREAS expanding air quality monitoring stations and the reach of the AQHI to more communities in the North would benefit communities' health, and would provide a more robust surveillance system on wildfire smoke impacts;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Board of Health for Public Health Sudbury & Districts endorse the letters dated July 5, 2023 from the Porcupine Health Unit and August 1, 2023, from the Timiskaming Health Unit to the Honourable Minister, David Piccini, calling for the installation of Air Quality Monitoring Stations in their respective service areas; and

FURTHER THAT air quality monitoring stations and the AQHI be expanded across Northern Ontario to improve opportunities for health for all.

The AQHI can increase awareness of impacts of air pollutants, including those created by wildfire smoke, and reduce or eliminate serious health impacts through adherence to health protective advice. Access to the AQHI, informed by local data, could benefit everyone. At the community level, it can have a significant positive impact when used to inform health protective policies, for example for outdoor recreational programs, daycares, and long-term care homes.

With this in mind, we support the Timiskaming Health Unit and Porcupine Health Unit calling for installation of air quality monitoring stations in their respective service areas, and further call for expansion of air quality monitoring stations and the AQHI across Northern Ontario.

Sincerely,



René Lapierre
Chair, Board of Health

cc: The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier of Ontario, Minister of Health
The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Member of Parliament, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
The Honourable Mark Holland, Member of Parliament, Minister of Health
Carol Hughes, Member of Parliament, Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing
Marc Serré, Member of Parliament, Nickel Belt
Viviane Lapointe, Member of Parliament, Sudbury
Michael Mantha, Member of Provincial Parliament, Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing
France Gélinas, Member of Provincial Parliament, Nickel Belt
Jamie West, Member of Provincial Parliament, Sudbury
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
All Ontario Boards of Health

¹ Government of Canada. *Wildfire smoke 101: Wildfire smoke and your health*.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/wildfire-smoke-health.html>. Accessed 2023/10/04.

² Government of Canada. *Wildfire smoke 101: Wildfire smoke and your health*.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/wildfire-smoke-health.html>. Accessed 2023/10/04.

³ Government of Canada. About the Air Quality Health Index. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/about.html>. Accessed 2023/10/04