

July 5, 2023

Honourable Minister David Piccini
Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
5th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3
Sent Via E-mail

Subject: Request for Air Quality Monitoring Stations in the Porcupine Health Unit region

Dear Minister Piccini,

We are writing to request the installation of air quality monitoring stations in the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) region. On June 8, 2023, the Board of Health for the Porcupine Health Unit carried the following resolution #BOH-2023-06-66:

***Be It Resolved,** that the Board of Health for the Porcupine Health Unit direct the Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer and Board of Health Chair to write a letter requesting the installation of air quality monitoring stations in the Porcupine Health Unit Region.*

The implementation of these monitoring stations is crucial to ensure the health and well-being of the residents in this region. As per the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), boards of health are required to prepare for emergencies, and protect public health and reduce the risk of adverse health outcomes resulting from poor air quality.¹ Unfortunately, the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) region currently lacks the necessary infrastructure for comprehensive air quality monitoring. This deficiency prevents accurate assessment of poor air quality exposure and potential health risks faced by PHU communities, thus limiting data-informed and community specific recommendations for community members, especially those at higher risk of negative health impacts.

The need for this capacity has become more urgent with the ongoing forest fire season and significant air quality alerts due to wildfire smoke. As the largest geographic health unit in the province, covering over 274,000 square kilometers, sharing lands with 11 distinct First Nation communities, poor air quality due to forest fire smoke is not new however is an increasing concern and we need access to the appropriate information to respond to these emergencies.

Air pollution is a significant public health concern, as it has detrimental effects on human health. Exposure to poor air quality is associated with increased rates of respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and even premature death.² The PHU population experiences poorer health status compared to Ontario, with a higher percentage of the population reporting chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure,³ and thus many community members are at greater risk from the ill effects of poor air quality due to pollution as well as wildfire smoke.

Climate change has exacerbated air pollution issues, leading to increased health risks and environmental challenges. Rising temperatures, increased frequency of wildfires, and changing weather patterns contribute to the release of pollutants into the air, posing significant health risks to our communities.⁴ Monitoring air quality will enable a better understanding of the complex interactions between climate change and air pollution across the vast region, allowing us to assess exposure levels to air pollution and develop targeted strategies to address these interconnected issues.

These targeted strategies for air pollution would also benefit environmental justice. Environmental justice is of the utmost importance in the Porcupine region, which is home to many equity-deserving and marginalized communities. These communities are often disproportionately affected by poor air quality and environmental hazards, resulting in disproportionate health disparities.^{5,6} By installing air quality monitoring stations, we can better protect the health of all residents, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical location. This initiative aligns with our commitment to promote environmental justice and reduce health inequities in the Porcupine region. Installing air quality monitoring stations in strategic locations of the Porcupine region would also be an investment in the health and well-being of our communities. By proactively monitoring air quality, we can detect pollutant trends, identify potential sources of pollution, and implement targeted interventions. This approach has been proven to reduce the burden of disease, improve overall health outcomes, and ultimately lead to cost savings for the healthcare system.^{2, 7,8}

Furthermore, the implementation of air quality monitoring stations would provide several immediate benefits to the communities in the Porcupine region. Firstly, it would increase public awareness and knowledge regarding air quality and its impact on health. With access to real-time air quality data, residents can make informed decisions about outdoor activities, particularly for higher risk groups such as children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing cardiac and respiratory conditions. It is also critical to inform local collaborative emergency response plans to ensure risk reduction measures and indoor spaces with clean air are available to all, including the increasing population facing under housing and homelessness. Secondly, these monitoring stations would enable us to assess the effectiveness of pollution control measures and policies. By analyzing the data collected, we can evaluate the impact of various interventions, advocate for evidence-based policies, and ensure that air quality standards are being met.

We urge you to consider this request for the timely installation of air quality monitoring stations in the Porcupine Health Unit region. By doing so, we will fulfill our obligations under the OPHS, protect the health of our residents, and promote sustainable development. The availability of accurate air quality data will empower communities to make informed decisions, reduce exposure to pollutants, and improve overall health outcomes.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your positive response and discussing the next steps in implementing air quality monitoring stations in the Porcupine Health Unit region.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Boileau
Board of Health Chair



Dr. Lianne Catton
Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer
Porcupine Health Unit

Copy: Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Honourable Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier of Ontario, Minister of Health
Honourable Steven Guibeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Bernard Derible, Parliamentary Deputy Minister, Emergency Management, Treasury Board Secretariat
Commissioner of Emergency Management
Honourable George Pirie, Member of Provincial Parliament Timmins
Honourable John Vanthof, Member of Provincial Parliament Timiskaming - Cochrane
Honourable Guy Bourgouin, Member of Provincial Parliament Mushkegowuk-James Bay
Honourable Charlie Angus, Member of Parliament Timmins
Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Member of Parliament, Minister of Health
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health
Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Health Agencies (ALPHA)
All Ontario Boards of Health
All Member Municipalities of the Porcupine Health Unit

References

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