

WORKING WITH
PARTNERS TO ACHIEVE

CLEANAIR



April 30, 2008

Dr. Karim Kurji
Medical Officer of Health
Public Health Programs
Community and Health Services Department
Public Health Branch
17250 Yonge Street, 2nd Floor
Newmarket, ON
L3Y 6Z1

Dear Dr. Karim Kurji:

The Clean Air Partnership is working in partnership with the GTA Public Health Units, Environment Canada, Health Canada, and the Ministry of the Environment to promote awareness of how the GTA residents can protect their health from air pollution and how they can take action to reduce their energy use and air pollution emissions.

As part of that effort, the new Air Quality Health Index was pilot tested in the City of Toronto in 2007 and is expanding to serve the GTA starting on June 4th, 2008, national Clean Air Day.

The Clean Air Partnership is looking forward to working with the GTA health units to develop outreach strategies and activities to promote the new Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) to GTA residents. Please find attached general background information on the AQHI and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air campaign.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have additional questions or require more information.

Sincerely,

Gabriella Kalapos
Director, Outreach Programs
Clean Air Partnership

About The Air Quality Health Index

The quality of the air has long been recognized as an important element of public health. Research undertaken by Health Canada, the Ontario Medical Association and Toronto Public Health has shown that current levels of air pollution in the GTA and southern Ontario have significant health impacts.

While part of the impact is the result of long term exposure to pollution, evidence also links short-term exposure to air pollutants with a variety of adverse health effects, ranging from subtle (sub-clinical) effects such as reduced lung function to premature death. Pre-existing cardiovascular and respiratory disease increases susceptibility to air pollution, and for some people air pollution affects their health even during periods of air pollution that are not high enough to register concern using existing air pollution reporting systems. As the population ages, the number of people with increased susceptibility to air pollution will rise. Climate change impacts are also likely to exacerbate local and regional air pollution and increase public health impacts.

In order to protect public health, measures on two fronts are required:

1. To inform the public on how to monitor, assess and reduce their public health risks due to air pollution; and
2. To increase the awareness and implementation of the actions that can play a role in reducing air pollution.

Since 2001, Environment Canada and Health Canada have been developing a national, health risk-based AQI— known as the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)— through a multi-stakeholder committee process involving the provinces, municipalities and members from the health and environmental non-government organization community.

The ***Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)*** is a new national health based index that will help Canadians better understand how to protect their health from local air pollution on a daily, or even hourly, basis. This is similar to the *UV Index* that helps Canadians protect themselves from sun exposure. It was pilot tested in the City of Toronto in 2007 and is being expanded to serve the GTA starting in May 2008.

AQHI A Scale of 1 to 10

The AQHI is a communications tool that enables individuals to protect their health, and that of people in their care. The AQHI provides a number from 1 to 10+ to indicate the level of health risk associated with local air quality. The higher the number, the greater the health risk and hence the greater the need to take precautions.

The AQHI reading distinguishes between the at-risk and general population to provide them with different health messages. The at-risk group includes children, seniors, and people of all ages with pre-existing heart and breathing problems.

More than a number

The Air Quality Health Index is more than just a number – it's a tool that helps you plan a healthy day. Since strenuous activities increase the amount of air you breathe, the Air Quality Health Index can help you decide when to enjoy the benefits of physical activity and when to reduce or reschedule your activity.

The Air Quality Health Index provides different health messages for the at-risk and general population. The at-risk group includes children, the elderly, and people with pre-existing heart and breathing problems.

20/20 The Way to Clean Air

The AQHI will build on the vision for positive change that forms the Greater Toronto Area-wide 20/20 The Way to Clean Air campaign. It will connect the public to tools from the 20/20 campaign for taking immediate or long-term actions to reduce their own air pollution emissions, particularly in home energy use and vehicle use.

The 20/20 campaign provides individuals and communities in the Greater Toronto Area with tools and resources to help achieve 20% reductions in home energy use and vehicle use. The campaign serves as an ideal mechanism for linking the message of the impacts of air pollution on personal health with an appreciation of what individuals can do to reduce their personal air pollution contribution.

Protect your health. *Know the numbers.*

For more information and to start using the Air Quality Health Index, visit www.airhealth.ca

For more information on 20/20 and how to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, visit
www.cleanairpartnership.org/2020

Additional Questions on AQHI and 20/20?

Contact Gabriella Kalapos at the Clean Air Partnership
416-338-1288 or gkalapos@cleanairpartnership.org

About the Clean Air Partnership

The Clean Air Partnership (CAP) is a registered charity that works in partnership to promote and coordinate actions to improve local air quality and reduce greenhouse gases for healthy communities. Our applied research on municipal policies strives to broaden and improve access to public policy debate on air pollution and climate change issues. Our social marketing programs focus on energy conservation activities that motivate individuals, government, schools, utilities, businesses and communities to take action to clean the air.