

700 Lawrence Ave. W., Suite 310
Toronto, Ontario M6A 3B4

Tel: (416) 367-3313
1-800-267-6817 (Ont)
Fax: (416) 367-2844
E-mail: info@opha.on.ca
www.opha.on.ca

Honorary Patron

The Hon. David C. Onley
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario

President

Carol Timmings
E-mail: ctimmings@opha.on.ca

Executive Director

Connie Uetrecht
E-mail: cuetrecht@opha.on.ca

Constituent Societies

ANDSOOHA – Public Health
Nursing Management in Ontario

Association of Ontario
Health Centres

Association of Public Health
Epidemiologists in Ontario

Association of Supervisors of Public
Health Inspectors of Ontario

Canadian Institute of Public
Health Inspectors (Ontario Branch)

Community Health Nurses' Initiatives
Group (RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario:
Public Health

Ontario Association of Public Health
Dentistry

Ontario Public Health Libraries
Association

Ontario Society of Nutrition
Professionals in Public Health

Public Health Research, Education
and Development (PHRED)
Program

Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

September 27, 2002

**To: The Honourable Ernie Eves
Premier of Ontario**

Dear Premier:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), a non-profit organization that represents many of the staff working in public health units across this province. Our members include the environmental health managers, epidemiologists, nurses, toxicologists, researchers, and policy analysts responsible for maintaining the health of their communities. As such, our members are deeply concerned about two inter-related issues, global climate change and air quality, and the impacts that these two issues are having, and could have, on the health of the communities they are duty-bound to protect.

This summer we experienced one of the hottest summers in this century with temperatures exceeding 30 degrees C for 32 days in southern Ontario. We also experienced more smog events (i.e. ten advisories covering 27 days) than any summer since the Ministry of the Environment began issuing smog advisories.

We know that poor air quality can have a significant impact upon the health of our communities. The Ontario Medical Association has estimated that particulate matter in Ontario's air contributes to about 1,900 premature deaths per year, while researchers at Health Canada have demonstrated that the gaseous air pollutants may be responsible for about 7.7% of premature deaths experienced each year in Canadian cities. We also know that heat waves can significantly increase death rates and hospital admissions. For example, one study demonstrated that the number of deaths increased by 85% in Chicago during a five-day heat wave in which temperatures ranged between 93 and 104 degrees F (34 and 40°C).

This summer, we in public health also had to respond to the spread of the West Nile Virus, an insect-borne disease that was not seen on this continent until the summer of 1999. While the introduction of this disease cannot be attributed to climate change, it has given us a taste of what may come with climate change. The World Health Organisation suggests that certain insect-borne diseases, such as malaria, may extend their ranges as global temperatures rise, and could become endemic in some regions of Canada.

We know that both issues, climate change and poor air quality, are inextricably linked to the energy policies of nations around the world. The burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, gasoline, diesel and natural gas, give rise to both the greenhouse gases that are driving global climate change and the smog precursors that contribute to poor air quality in industrialized nations.

If we are to stabilize the global climate, improve air quality, and protect public health, we must make a shift in our economy. We must move away from our reliance on fossil fuels. We must develop renewable energy sources that do not damage the environment upon which human life depends. We must increase the efficiency with which we use our energy supplies. Ontario's Select Committee on Alternative Fuel Sources has prepared a road map with which to accomplish these goals.

The 2002 report of the Select Committee is a visionary document that identifies 141 actions that could be taken by the Ontario Government to encourage a shift away from fossil fuels and towards energy efficiency measures and renewable energy sources. We therefore encourage you to embrace this report and to move quickly to implement its recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Connie Uetrecht
President, OPHA

c.c. Norm Sterling, Minister of Transportation
Chris Hodgson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Janet Ecker, Minister of Finance
Tony Clement, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Chris Stockwell, Minister of Energy and the Environment
Marilyn Churley, Environment Critic, NDP
James Bradley, Environment Critic, Liberal Party