



Air Quality

The way our communities are designed can impact the air we breathe. In communities where homes are far from schools, jobs and shopping, people drive more frequently and for longer distances. Vehicle emissions are a major contributor to air pollution. These emissions are not just from driving, but also from idling on city streets, in parking lots and while waiting at drive-thrus. The location and number of industries and high traffic corridors also affect the level of air pollution in a community.

Air pollution is associated with asthma and other respiratory diseases, heart disease, cancer and premature death. While poor air quality affects everyone, the young, the elderly and those with health problems are more likely to experience illness, hospitalization or premature death. When we design and plan our communities, we need to carefully consider the location of sensitive populations (e.g., homes, as well as day care centres, schools, retirement homes and long term care facilities).

Did you know?

-  The Canadian Medical Association estimates that in 2008, air pollution resulted in 592 premature deaths and over \$1.4 billion in lost productivity and health costs in York Region.
-  According to Statistics Canada, 6.8% of people aged 12 and over have asthma in York Region.
-  York Region's Official Plan has policies that improve air quality by prioritizing walking and cycling, discouraging single occupancy vehicle use and supporting public transit. Other policies require certain development plans to provide air quality impact studies to protect sensitive populations.
-  The Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) provides current information on local air quality and helps individuals make decisions on how to protect their health.
-  According to Statistics Canada, 72% of Canadians regularly travel to work in a vehicle alone.

Building Healthy Communities



You can make a difference when you . . .

- Walk, cycle, use public transit or carpool. If you must drive, combine trips to be efficient, and reduce vehicle idling.
- Participate in the *20/20 The Way to Clean Air* program. To improve air quality, *20/20* encourages citizens to reduce energy use by 20% at home and on the road. Visit www.cleanairpartnership.org/2020 for a free *20/20 Planner Guide*.
- Check the Air Quality Health Index when you plan outdoor activities. Visit www.airhealth.ca for more information.
- Reduce electricity use: purchase energy efficient appliances, unplug electronics not in use and use major appliances during off-peak hours.
- Learn more about your municipality's official plan and how it affects air quality.

Municipalities show leadership when they . . .

- Consider air quality in decisions about land use planning, transportation, community design, and in official plans and strategic documents.
- Support initiatives on renewable energy production, energy efficient buildings, local food production, reduced travel, and hybrid vehicles for fleets.
- Increase the number of safe cycling and walking routes and improve access to public transit.
- Work with stakeholders to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Ensure homes, day care centres, schools, retirement homes and long term care facilities are not located near sources of emissions.

**Be an active partner where you live, learn, work and play.
Participate in building healthy communities!**

Adapted with permission from Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

For more information, refer to other fact sheets in this series or contact
York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933.
www.york.ca

