
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2004HSER0089-001073
Dec. 15, 2004

Ministry of Health Services

REPORT EXAMINES AIR QUALITY IN B.C.

VICTORIA – British Columbians enjoy good air quality by Canadian and world standards, but indoor and outdoor air pollutants can cause harmful health effects, according to the 2003 provincial health officer's annual report.

“Most British Columbians are exposed to lower concentrations of air pollutants compared with people in more populated and industrialized parts of the world,” said Dr. Perry Kendall as he released his report today. “We have a collective responsibility to prevent and reduce the negative impacts of air pollution. We can focus on public education and what we can do as government, society and individuals to continue improving air quality for our communities now and in the future.”

The annual report provides a review of B.C. studies, Ontario studies and international data on air pollution. This review estimates the burden of ill health and examines the health effects from air pollution in B.C. Health effects can include cardiovascular and respiratory disease, such as asthma, bronchitis, lung cancer and related infections.

The number of premature deaths due to air pollution is estimated between 140 and 400 per year, with second-hand smoke being the largest single factor affecting indoor air quality. Each year, between 700 and 2,000 hospital admissions and between 900 and 2,700 emergency room visits occur due to air pollution. Annual health care costs of treating illness resulting from air pollution are conservatively estimated at \$167 million.

Major indoor air pollutants include second-hand smoke, mold, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and radon. Major sources of outdoor air pollutants include burning of fossil fuels such as gas, oil, coal and wood, burning of agricultural and forestry materials, and vehicle and industrial manufacturing emissions.

The levels of air pollutants in B.C. vary, with the Interior, the north and the Lower Fraser Valley having more exposure to pollutants than other areas.

Five priority actions are recommended for reducing the burden of ill health from air pollution in B.C.:

- Reduce exposure to second-hand smoke across the province.
- Decrease exposure to airborne particles in the interior and northern regions.
- Reduce aboriginal people's exposure to indoor air pollutants such as molds and second-hand smoke, particularly in reserve communities.
- Reduce vehicle emission and other transportation pollutant exposure in the Lower Fraser Valley.
- Provide public education programs on what individuals can do to improve air quality.

Find more information in the Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report 2003 at:
<http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/pho/pdf/phoannual2003.pdf> online.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

Media Public Affairs Bureau
contact: Ministry of Health Services
 250 952-1887

Visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca for online information and services.