

City of Windsor Air Quality Action Plan Report Card



Citizens Environment Alliance

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Introduction

On July 28, 1998, the Citizens Environment Alliance (CEA) proposed an anti-smog action plan for the City of Windsor and its departments. Although Council did not adopt the plan, it was referred to City departments for review and comment. Almost two years later, the Windsor Essex County Air Quality Committee (WECAQC) revised and approved a similar plan, Final Report: Components and Recommendations for a Successful Air Quality Action Plan. On May 15, 2000, Windsor City Council unanimously passed this plan in an effort to mitigate the City's dreadfully poor air quality.

This Air Quality Action Plan Report Card summarizes the commitments made by Council, evaluates progress to date and grades the City's efforts in implementing its Air Quality Action Plan. We have used the report's structure, which outlines both emergency measures and long term air quality strategies, condensing some sections to avoid redundancy. This is the CEA's first annual Air Quality Action Plan Report Card.

A "progress report", issued by the CEA in June after this region's first smog alert, yielded abysmal marks of nearly all failing grades. Promises to appoint an Interim Air Quality Co-ordinator and to establish a hotline had yet to happen. Pesticide spraying occurred in city parks and the use of gas-powered park equipment was widespread. City employees were notified of the impending smog alert via email but little follow-up was evident. The City made no attempt to notify the public of this public health threat. No progress was evident in the area of encouraging employees to carpool or use public transit. The paving industry did not comply with the voluntary suspension of municipal road paving or resurfacing, despite a commitment from the Heavy Construction Association to do so. There had been no progress towards an anti-idling policy for the city fleet or Transit Windsor.

In this, the final report for 2000 only a few grades have improved. While the CEA acknowledges that there is a degree of "ironing out" entailed in implementing any new program, the City has had five full months to do so. Moreover, considering that the CEA proposed a similar action plan in July 1998, all departments of the City of Windsor have been looking at suggested responsibilities for quite some time. Furthermore, other cities in Canada and the US have plans in place that serve as models. So, with the end of this smog season, the first with an air quality policy in place, and a municipal election only weeks away, this is an opportune time to gauge the City of Windsor's commitment to improving the air we breathe.

The Essex County Air Quality Action Plan is limited to the County of Essex Corporate Properties, which includes the Civic Centre, the Public Library properties and a small number of other properties under County Council's jurisdiction. The Corporation of the County of Essex has failed to influence its member municipalities to adopt air quality action plans and has failed to inform WECAQC or the public what actions have been implemented. For these reasons this report considers the County of Essex a non-player in efforts to mitigate smog in this region. Thus, the report that follows is strictly an evaluation of the City of Windsor's performance in fulfilling its Air Quality Action Plan.

Smog is a combination of ground level ozone and fine airborne particles. It is best understood as a mixture of air pollutants such as vapours, particles and gases that blanket an area with a yellowish haze. Weather, motor vehicle density and the presence of industrial plants that emit pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxides, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) influence it. In Ontario, "smog alerts" occur when the concentration of ground level ozone exceeds 80ppb (parts per billion).

In Windsor, recent trends show that the occurrence of smog is bad and getting worse, earning us the distressing title of "Smog Capital of Canada". The causes include poor land use planning (urban sprawl), automobile emissions, and heavy industrialization on both sides of the border and hot humid summers. It is important to note that Windsor enjoyed an unseasonably cool summer this year, yielding only four air quality alerts. The number of air quality alert days in 1999—thirty—was more typical for this region. In the next section, we offer recommendations for municipal candidates to improve the grades in preparation for the 2001 smog season.

For the upcoming year 2001, the CEA recommends that the City of Windsor:

- ✓ Work with the Windsor Essex County Air Quality Committee (WECAQC) to devise a plan with air pollution reduction targets and a firm implementation timeline.
- ✓ Ensure that all departments report their anti-smog strategies to the public. This will demonstrate that improving air quality is a priority.
- ✓ Work with industry and other levels of government to improve local monitoring. A good local monitoring system is crucial in reducing air pollution.
- ✓ Increase the effectiveness of WECAQC through better communication and insist that Public Works and other departments share their decision-making power.
- ✓ Replace the voluntary nature of the 2000 plan with contractual obligations for each department of the city and for all-municipal paving and pesticide spraying contracts.
- ✓ Actively encourage private corporations and other organizations to undertake anti-smog initiatives. This measure would result in significant improvements in our air quality.
- ✓ Allocate adequate funding so City departments can properly implement the provisions of the Air Quality Action Plan.
- ✓ Initiate such positive actions as allowing free public transit on smog alert days, augmenting Transit Windsor's summer scheduling, and phasing out diesel buses.

The City of Windsor allocated only \$20,000 (or approx. 10¢ per resident) this year to smog and greenhouse gas reduction measures, which is very little compared to other North American cities. According to the March 2000 report, Overview of Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emission Activities in the City of Toronto, prepared by the *Toronto Atmospheric Fund for the City of Toronto Budget Advisory, Policy and Finance, and Works Committees*, Toronto spends 77¢ (per capita), Vancouver \$1.29, Ottawa \$1.86, the San Francisco metro area \$4.03, and the Los Angeles metro area \$4.53. Clearly, air quality has not received due attention, which is the primary reason the City merits a failing grade. There is little evidence that decisions are being made that consider regional air quality impacts. If the city truly wishes to ameliorate our poor air quality a comprehensive change in "business as usual" will be necessary.

Windsor's Air Quality Report Card 2000

Table I: AIR QUALITY ADVISORY RESPONSE

What The City Promised:	What The City Delivered:	GRADE
i) AIR QUALITY ADVISORY MECHANISM		
Appointment of an Air Quality Coordinator	Successful implementation rests on a position that has yet to be created. A coordinator was promised for June 1, 2000.	F
Identification of an anticipatory air quality advisory mechanism	In spring 2000, WECAQC and City Council decided that the smog advisory alert mechanism used by the South East Michigan Council of Governments was preferable over the Ontario Ministry of the Environment's (MOE) system. However, the city administration, without consulting or informing WECAQC, unilaterally employed the MOE system, creating confusion for committee members, the media, and the public.	F
Response plan	There has been minimal effort to adhere to the response plan. This illustrates a fundamental problem: There is no real strategy to implement the directives of the Air Quality Action Plan.	D
ii) ACTIVATE COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURE		
Notify major employers, government departments and agencies, institutions and the public in the region regarding the smog advisory, with required and suggested actions	Notification of impending smog alerts entailed sending an email. There was no notification to the public of a smog alert from the City.	D
Staff hot line and update web site to provide information, advice and referrals regarding smog advisory and appropriate responses	To date there is no hotline, but as of this week the Air Quality Plan was posted on the City's website.	D
iii) SUGGESTED ACTIONS TO ALLEVIATE AIR QUALITY IMPACTS (Suspend or Reduce...)		
Non-essential motor vehicle use (use transit and alternative travel; delay deliveries and errands; use teleconferencing in lieu of driving to meetings; for essential vehicle use, give priority to alternative fuel/zero emission vehicles)	There is no evidence of any progress in this category, partially the result of the lack of a municipal implementation plan. Inquiries have to be made of individual departments, which is unacceptable, since this was supposed to be a coordinated effort. Thus, it is recommended that next year the city produce reports and a timetable.	F
Use of gasoline-powered equipment (including lawn mowers, trimmers, leaf blowers, chain saws)	The Parks & Recreation and Public Works departments accomplished some of the criteria in this category. This is the closest the city comes to abiding by the plan. These attempts should be applauded but they are still ad hoc and only represent a minor aspect of the plan.	C+
-Gasoline re-fuelling (delay essential re-fuelling until evening hours) -Use of solvents, oil-based paints and stains, solvent-based cleaners and other materials containing volatile organic compounds -Road and path sweeping operations -Use of air conditioning in all vehicles and buildings; use of lights	In all four categories there is no evidence that any of these actions were reduced or suspended. We can only assume that it was business as usual. Also, there is no sign of a long-term strategy to implement these actions. This demonstrates both a lack of commitment and a lack of communication with the committee, and a continuing problem for the successful implementation of the plan.	F
Pesticide spraying	The CEA received a number of complaints about spraying on smog days. A large portion of pesticide spraying is contracted out by the City, making the chances of communication or accountability difficult, as well as creating further logistical complications.	F

Suspend or Reduce... <i>continued</i>		
Road resurfacing and paving; asphalt roofing	Because compliance was voluntary, paving remained widespread on smog days. This is also an example of how the WECAQC is not being consulted by Public Works on pertinent issues.	F
Outdoor activities for vulnerable groups (children, elderly, those with heart or respiratory problems)	Schools were not notified in advance that June 9, 2000 would be a smog day. The CEA received complaints that some high school students were obligated to participate in rigorous outdoor gym classes.	F
Municipal, industrial and agricultural point and area source emissions of ozone precursors and particulate	There is no evidence of reduction in this area. The problem is that the City must rely on inadequate monitoring from the provincial and the federal governments. The data from the Windsor Air Quality Study is almost ten years old. If the city does not know what the sources are, it is naturally difficult to accomplish the tasks in this category.	F
Vehicle idling bylaw	City Council has taken little initiative on the proposed bylaw. Though the legal department has known of the proposed bylaw for months, they continue to stall and purposely ignore documents supportive of a bylaw, including copies of five existing anti-idling bylaws of other Ontario municipalities.	D+
Use of motorboats and recreational vehicles	Things are actually progressing in the opposite direction. The City's riverfront plan includes a transient marina in Windsor's downtown.	F
- Requirement of formal office attire - Incentives to employees to eat lunch in (refreshments, special lunch menu in cafeteria, etc.) - Flexible work schedules	For these three initiatives there is no evidence that any type of communication or information literature was offered to City of Windsor employees.	F

Table II: POTENTIAL SMOG PREVENTION INITIATIVES

What The City Promised:	What The City Delivered:	GRADE
i) PROMOTION OF ALTERNATIVE TRAVEL		
a. General Develop and implement regional transportation plan to improving air quality. That the City of Windsor commit to a timetable for re-routing diesel trucks away from the tunnel and downtown core, and further, to a traffic engineering study of truck traffic on Huron Church Road.	There are no signs of either a regional transportation plan with a view to improving air quality, nor a plan to re-route truck traffic away from downtown. The closest thing to a truck study would be the Windsor Area Long Term Transportation Study (WALTS). This was supposed to be integrated into the City's plan and yet there has been no sign of bike lanes. No truck study has been announced.	F
b. Human-Powered Transportation Enhance infrastructure (bicycle lanes/paths, sidewalks, racks, mixed mode) Provide support for employees (showers, secure storage for bicycles, financial incentives to ride or walk) Require staff to walk or cycle when appropriate (e.g., police, parking enforcement, couriers, deliveries) Require provision of secure bicycle storage in new developments Promote walking and cycling through education and partnership with community groups and local businesses (e.g., bike share program, "walking school bus")	Although the City and the Windsor Bicycling Committee have initiated the Bicycle Use Master Plan (BUMP) study, road reconstruction and expansion continue with no regard for cycling needs. The proposed Walker Road expansion and the completed McDougall Road resurfacing are examples of this neglect.	D

i) PROMOTION OF ALTERNATIVE TRAVEL (continued)		
<p>c. Transit Use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop and implement incentives to encourage increased transit use (e.g., subsidize transit passes, education) -Study feasibility of regional express buses, preferential fare structure, financial support, infrastructure (express lanes) -Promote corporate commuter service -Develop options for rural residents -Enhance public education program to encourage ridership 	<p>Although there has been criticism that county residents' use of the City of Windsor roadways goes unsubsidized, there has been no provision of alternatives to driving one's car. Credit is due Transit Windsor for putting bike racks on 17 of its buses as a pilot project to encourage ridership. It also participated on Clean Air Day with posters on its buses linking transit use with improved air quality. Future initiatives must include: low emission or no emission fleets, elimination of diesel buses, increased service during critical smog time and free service on smog alert days.</p>	D
<p>d. Ride Sharing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide economic and other incentives to promote ride sharing; remove disincentives (e.g., subsidized parking, priority parking spaces/lot, guaranteed ride) Provide assistance for development of trip reduction programs (e.g., education, ride matching service, challenge programs) Designate priority lanes for ride share vehicles Boat Services Study feasibility of water taxi or passenger ferry service between regional locations 	<p>There is no sign of a concerted effort in this area. The City needs to look at other municipalities that are already practising these small but significant measures.</p>	F
<p>e. Discourage Motor Vehicle Use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease amount of land dedicated to vehicles through promotion of denser development, mixed-use communities; provide incentives to developers (consistent with official plan policies) Restrict use of private cars (from certain areas, every other day, etc.) Modify parking policies and by-law requirements (e.g., shift subsidies from parking to transit or alternatives, raise parking fees, raise parking permit fee for second car, by-law to reduce number of paved spaces provided in new developments and redevelopment) 	<p>Not only are these measures not being met; there is evidence to the contrary. The Walker Road expansion and the allowance of Devonshire Mall parking lot expansion are two examples of pavement projects.</p> <p>Parking policies include giving free parking passes, rather than transit tokens, to city committee members attending meetings, and a plan to increase parking space at the riverfront by 40%.</p>	F
<p>f. Alternative Work Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow flexible hours to avoid peak road use Telecommuting (work at home, satellite offices), Teleconferencing/video-conferencing in lieu of driving to meetings 	<p>No evidence of action on any of these items.</p>	F
ii) REDUCTION OF EMISSIONS FROM VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT		
<p>a. Fleet and Equipment Reduction and Replacement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate program to replace fleet of vehicles with alternative fuel, zero emission vehicles; program to replace high emissions equipment Promote fleet reduction/replacement for local businesses through cooperative programs 	<p>Propane-powered police vehicles, now among the City-owned fleet, are examples of alternative fuel use. Unfortunately, the majority of vehicles do not yet employ alternative fuel options and there is no sign of a coordinated effort to do so. The City should set targets and a timeline to fulfil the requirements of this category.</p>	D

<p>ii) REDUCTION OF EMISSIONS FROM VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT (continued)</p> <p>Study feasibility of lawn mower, other equipment or vehicle buy-back or rebate program</p>		
<p>b. Emissions Reduction</p> <p>Install anti-idling timer on fleet vehicles</p> <p>Use reformulated gasoline, low sulphur fuel and alternative fuels</p> <p>Encourage the availability of low sulphur gasoline (prior to regulatory deadline) and alternative fuels at retail stations</p> <p>Require contracting or leasing companies to comply with specified standards for vehicles and equipment or with certification programs (such as Drive Clean)</p> <p>Implement an inspection and maintenance program for fleet vehicles</p> <p>Require installation of vapour recovery systems at fleet refueling stations</p> <p>Support regulations to mandate vapour recovery at retail fuel stations</p> <p>Lobby, and cooperate with, other levels of government to accelerate and improve mandatory emissions testing programs, anti-tampering regulations, air quality standards</p>	<p>There has been no discussion of anti-idling timers or the other innovations listed. Transit Windsor is resistant to using low emission fuels; their entire fleet still uses diesel. We reiterate the need for reporting of all departments on whether they are implementing these measures.</p>	F
iii) ENERGY USE REDUCTION		
<p>ACTION</p> <p>a. Power Sources</p> <p>Promote use of cogeneration, district heating and cooling</p> <p>Procure electricity from alternative power (non-coal fired) sources</p>	<p>District heating and cooling downtown has been a successful program. The CEA looks forward to seeing it expanded to other areas of the city. There are cogeneration facilities at Chrysler, Ford, the University of Windsor, Casino Windsor, Ford, and several other facilities. Also, City Council has clearly signalled to the provincial government the need to eliminate coal-fired plants. Keep up the good work!</p>	A
<p>b. Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Retrofit existing buildings for energy and hot water efficiency; promote private sector retrofit through cooperatives programmes (e.g., Toronto's Better Buildings Partnership)</p> <p>Promote energy efficiency in new design and construction</p>	<p>New construction projects and the refurbishing of older structures present opportunities for the City to promote energy efficient design. There has been no evidence that such opportunities are being exploited. The absence of such initiative is particularly evident in the Canderel project plans, which call for roof parking instead of a "green" rooftop garden.</p>	F
<p>c. Reduce Urban Heat Island Effect</p> <p>Use lighter colour pavement and roofing; alternatives to paved surfaces</p> <p>Use strategic tree planting to shade pavement and buildings and protect existing shade trees</p> <p>Increase green space (reclaim pavement), restore natural areas, naturalized planting (to reduce amount of grass), native species, use of roof gardens on public and private property</p>	<p>The actions in this category are varied. In some respects, the City has been stagnant on these issues. For example, there is no sign of a tree planting program. In other ways, the City has worked against the measures. The Erie Street tree planting opportunity was forgone and a new parking lot was put in at Parent Avenue; the Devonshire Mall was allowed to increase its parking space, and the Canderel project calls for roof parking instead of greenspace.</p> <p>Yet the City needs to be commended for purchasing and protecting the Spring Garden ANSI, on Windsor's west end, and for the protection of Pêche Island.</p>	C
iv) OTHER		
<p>a. Smog Prevention and Reduction Plan Implementation</p>	<p>Funding, target setting and evaluation are fundamental aspects of any anti-smog action plan. Regrettably, they are absent here. Funding is controlled by Public Works—who have yet to show a commitment to clean air. There is no established program for target setting or evaluation.</p>	F

<p>iv) OTHER (continued)</p> <p>Establish clean air fund; direct fees, fines and other moneys into the fund (to be used for anti-smog initiatives)</p> <p>Set emissions reductions targets</p> <p>Establish program for plan evaluation; audits</p>		
<p>ACTION</p> <p>b. Education and Communication</p> <p>Develop and implement a comprehensive smog prevention education and communication plan</p> <p>Prepare annual report on smog action and goal achievement</p> <p>Establish awards for meeting or exceeding goals and for innovative smog reduction ideas</p>	<p>This category would more appropriately be titled "Inaction".</p> <p>Education is key to the success of any public interest campaign. Communication is the cornerstone of public education. But despite its importance to public health, no visible action has been taken.</p>	F
<p>c. Particulate and Dust Reduction</p> <p>Develop program for dust suppression at construction sites and aggregate storage facilities</p> <p>Develop program for dust reduction from roads</p>	<p>Although some industries have their own programs, there is no overall city effort to encourage others to follow suit. The City does have a program to limit dust on main roadways; it needs to be expanded and the private sector should be encouraged to follow suit.</p> <p>A combined sweeping and vacuuming system, such as the one used by Hamilton, could be looked into by the City of Windsor to further reduce air-borne particulate matter.</p>	C
<p>d. Phase Out of Cosmetic Use of Pesticides</p> <p>Educate on alternatives to pesticide use, "green" lawn care</p>	<p>On October 10, 2000, Council finally adopted as its goal the elimination of the cosmetic use of pesticides on municipal properties. Unfortunately, the absence of a timetable and lack of hard figures on current and past pesticide use severely undermines the credibility of Council's intention.</p>	C

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