

CANCER RISK GROWING TORONTO STAR FILE

**Haze and smog obscure
Toronto's skyline in this file
image.**

Group targets toxins in the air

**Coalition calls for laws to tell
people of dangerous
substances and remove
them from environment**

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Ontarians are living in a toxic soup that's increasing our risk of getting cancer and it's high time the government takes steps to obliterate this environmental threat, a coalition of health and labour groups says.

This province doesn't have a strategy in place to reduce the amounts of more than 150 toxins and carcinogens in the air we breathe, the food we eat and products we use every day, according to a report released today by the broad-based group.

Organizations, including Cancer Care Ontario, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Ontario Medical Association, the Ontario Federation of Labour and public health units across the province, are calling on all levels of government, with an emphasis in Ontario, for legislation that will decrease, or remove these substances from our air and let us know what we're being exposed to.

"What we need is to develop a full-blown strategy and if this doesn't happen we will only see an increase in toxin- and carcinogen-related illnesses," says Doris Grinspun, executive director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, one of the groups involved.

The comprehensive study, obtained by the *Star*, includes a list of toxins and carcinogens emitted in Ontario as well as 10 policy recommendations to help three levels of government get a handle on this health concern. While the exact link between cancer risk and the environment is still the subject of research, it's been shown, Grinspun says, that even fetuses are affected by toxins in the environment, thus increasing incidence of childhood cancers.

If this hazard is left to fester, it will contribute to tens of thousands of new cancer diagnoses each year, the study suggests. In 2020 that number is projected to be 91,000 new cases. The most vulnerable to the toxins are pregnant women, fetuses, children, seniors and aboriginals, the study says.

Substances under fire include cigarette smoke, pesticides, soot and tar from certain industrial operations, asbestos, diesel exhaust, chemicals released by the production of

herbicides and refining coal, and even products found in barbershops and hairdressing salons.

Report recommendations – the result of two years of research into current regulations in the European Union and the United States – include capping carcinogen use, establishing a provincial institute to research alternative substances and helping industry switch to less- or non-toxic chemicals that do the same jobs. The report also calls for programs to track how these toxic substances impact Ontarians' well-being and the health-care system.

The coalition would like to see labels, indicating which carcinogens are present, on all consumer products sold in Ontario, and public education to make people aware of the risks of being around these hazardous substances.