

Smog could be hazard this weekend

In Ontario, 9,500 will die of it

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Think about the smog these hot and steamy days are cooking up before you take that next breath.

An estimated 9,500 die every year in the province due to air pollution, according to research released yesterday by the Ontario Medical Association.

"Smog has chemicals that our body can't manage -- particularly nitric oxide, which is nasty stuff and it goes into the blood ... attaches to our cells and protein in our blood and overwhelms our system," the OMA's Dr. Ted Boadway said.

Smog damages the muscle cells of blood vessels, he said, and lungs can become inflamed on hot humid days losing 6% of their function. Permanent damage can accumulate over the years from smog.

In Toronto alone, 2,130 people are killed by smog each year -- either during or immediately following periods of increased pollution or from long-term exposure to bad air.

The OMA has been warning the public about this issue since 1998 yet "we haven't seen any improvement," Boadway said.

"I am disappointed things haven't gotten better ... we can decrease our own pollution as much as we can, but we need a lot of changes in society as a whole," Boadway said.

In 2007, Ontario had 59 bad air days.

"With the heat and humidity this weekend, we may have a smog day," said Dave Phillips, senior climatologist with Environment Canada, adding that the humidex could be hitting 40C this weekend.

Yesterday, Toronto hit a record 32.5C at 2 p.m. The previous mark was 31.9C in 1999.

The OMA said you can beat the heat by reducing strenuous outdoor activities, drinking fluids, staying in an air-conditioned environment and knowing your limits.