



Building Healthy Communities

Air Quality

Where you live affects your health. The way our communities are designed can influence our lives in many ways, from the quality of the air we breathe to how physically active we are.

How you live affects the environment. The choices you make every day can have an impact on the environment in a positive or negative way. We share our surroundings with each other and must work together to make changes for the better. Municipalities, health units and others are working to create healthier communities by planning for trails and sidewalks, parks and public spaces, safe roads, reductions in personal vehicle use, access to healthy local food, energy conservation and many other health supporting features. You can help too! Good health starts with each person, but it takes a community to support it.

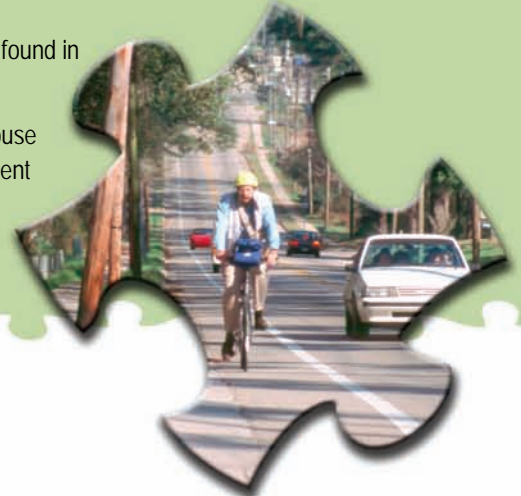
Better Air
= A Healthier Community
= A Healthier You

The greatest source of air pollution is greenhouse gas emissions from energy and vehicle use. Vehicles, road dust and off-road equipment are responsible for about two-thirds of the gases that cause air pollution. Spread out communities with neighbourhoods located far from shopping, schools and jobs lead to more people driving. This results in increased vehicle emissions that contribute to air pollution. Air pollution is linked to many illnesses, including asthma, heart disease, various cancers, high blood pressure, stroke and premature death.

Think about the decisions you make and the actions you take that affect the quality of our air.

Did you know?

- More than 10 per cent of children in Canada have asthma. Air pollution makes asthma symptoms worse. Research suggests that exposure to air pollution may lead to the development of asthma.
- Premature death can result from long-term effects of exposure to particulate matter found in air pollution. The majority of premature deaths are suffered by the elderly.
- If drivers in a community of 10,000 people avoided idling for three minutes, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would be reduced by 616,456 kilograms per year, the equivalent of taking 440 vehicles off the road.
- Conserving energy is critical to reducing GHG emissions and its harmful effects, including climate change.



You can make a difference when you...

- Walk, cycle, use public transit or carpool in place of using your car and commit to reducing unnecessary vehicle idling. Run this [Idling Calculator](http://www.oee.nrcan-rncan.gc.ca/transportation/tools/calculators/Idling/idlingimpact-workplace.cfm) to see the benefits. (www.oee.nrcan-rncan.gc.ca/transportation/tools/calculators/Idling/idlingimpact-workplace.cfm)
- Purchase energy star appliances, unplug electronics that are not in use and use major appliances during off-peak hours.
- Speak with your neighbours about the issues affecting air quality and discuss ways to address them.
- Learn more about your municipality's official plan and how it affects air quality.
 - The official plan guides how land should be used in your community, such as where housing, industry, shops, parks and schools will be located, what services are needed and how road and transportation systems are designed.
 - Official plans are updated at least every five years. A copy of the plan is made available to the public and your local council must ensure a public meeting is held about the plan.
- Contact your municipality at any time to discuss opportunities for input into your community's official plan. Any person can provide written comments and/or speak at the public meeting about the proposed plan.

Municipalities show leadership when they...

- Increase the number of safe cycling and walking routes and improve access to public transit where feasible.
- Manage vehicle fleets by purchasing hybrid and/or more fuel-efficient vehicles.
- Implement anti-idling policies and bylaws.
- Support green initiatives such as tree preservation and green roofs.
- Purchase green energy and retrofit municipal buildings to be more energy efficient (such as the use of solar panels, energy recapture and compact fluorescent lights).

For more information:

Refer to other fact sheets in this series: Active Transportation, Road Safety, Food Access and Healthy Communities.