

July 21, 2011

**Remarks by Franz Hartmann, Executive Director, Toronto Environmental Alliance
to the Parks and Environment Committee
on the Core Services Review**

My name is Franz Hartmann. I am the Executive Director of the Toronto Environmental Alliance. We represent over 15,000 Torontonians who want to build a greener Toronto for all.

It's rather fitting that today, one of the hottest day on record in Toronto, we are here discussing the Mayor's consultant's recommendation to eliminate a key city service, the Toronto Environment Office, that is playing a vital role in making sure Toronto is prepared to survive severe weather days like today.

Let me explain. Heat waves put a huge strain on the electrical distribution system. Like everything else, wires and transformers get really hot. Add to this the huge additional demand for electricity to power air conditioners on top of all the other appliances we usually need, and we get closer and closer to overloading the system and causing a blackout. And if Toronto were to have a black-out during a day like today, lots and lots of people would die.

The best way to guard against this is by cutting electricity use. If our air conditioners aren't turned on as high, if we get rid of old, energy hog appliances and replace them with energy efficient ones, if businesses conserve energy, there is less demand for electricity and less strain on the system and that means we significantly reduce the likelihood of blackouts and deaths during heat waves.

And guess who ensures Torontonians conserve energy and are prepared for severe weather events? The Toronto Environment Office. And guess who ensures Toronto's infrastructure is ready for other severe weather events like floods and rainstorms? The Toronto Environment Office.

Yet, the Mayor's consultants suggest that the risks and implications of eliminating the work done by the TEO are low.

My response is the Mayor's consultants have not done their homework. In fact, they are completely oblivious to one of the most expensive and deadly threats facing Toronto and the planet: global warming and the extreme weather events.

Let me read you an excerpt from a recent TEO report:

"Extreme weather associated with changing weather patterns have been very costly to Toronto. For example, the August 2005 storm cost almost \$500 million to the insurance industry in claim payouts (e.g. basement flooding & other damage to cars, homes and businesses) and \$40 million to the City for road, bridge and sewer infrastructure repairs.

“The World Bank [has] recently identified cities and their infrastructure to be at significant risk due to climate change. The problem of increasing frequency of extreme weather in Toronto is compounded by the age and under-capacity of our city infrastructure. Vulnerable people, such as the elderly, persons in poor health and/or having lower income are an added concern.”

Put simply, eliminating the TEO has high -not low- risks and implications for Torontonians. If the Mayor decides to eliminate the city’s capacity to plan for these increasing frequent severe weather events, he won’t save taxpayers money: he will ensure we all pay a huge amount more in the future as we lurch unprepared into a global warming future.

If we want days like today not to become future disasters for the city’s vulnerable and for the city’s economy, we need to plan for them and that means we need the TEO.

There are many other important services offered by the TEO that I know others will speak to and that are completely ignored by the Mayor’s consultants.

It’s beyond belief that they would, in 2011, recommend eliminating the very office in Toronto that is preparing us for dealing with global warming, just as the rest of the world is ramping up this important work.

Finally, there is a wise proverb that I’m sure every one has heard: those who don’t know their history are doomed to repeat it. I fear the Mayor’s consultants may have forgotten their history. Recall in 1996, the Province of Ontario decided to dramatically cut back on staff and funding for the Ministry of Environment as a cost-saving measure. The result: the Walkerton tragedy and a host of expensive environmental problems that are costing taxpayers significantly more than they saved by cutting the MOE.

I urge Mayor Ford and City Councillors not to make the same type of mistake. I urge you to keep the Toronto Environment Office.