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**Submission to: The Citizens' Forum on Public Health in the New City of Toronto  
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak about programmes which are essential to public health in the new City of Toronto. I would like to speak about experiences which I and my colleagues at the Canadian Environmental Law Association have had over the last two decades in working with and relying on the city initiatives to improve the health of its residents by improving their environment. These improvements have extended far beyond the boundaries of the City to benefit all who share the water, air, land of the ecosystem and share essential health protection services vital to their health and well-being.

Since the early 1980's Toronto's Board of Health and Health Department have integrated health protection programs with environmental protection programs by creating first the Health Advocacy Unit and then the Environmental Protection Office within the Health Department. These were the first municipal offices in Canada to recognize environmental protection in tangible public health programmes with an explicit mandate to collaborate and foster involvement of concerned residents through community boards across the City.

These offices not only responded to environmental problems raised at City Council but they have also: addressed historic neighbourhood pollution problems; anticipated and prevented public health problems from environmental degradation; provided in depth research on pathways of exposure to contaminants in some of the most informative studies in Canada on air, water, soil and food; and have provided leadership and models for other cities to take proactive approaches to health and environmental protection.

Some of the issues that CELA has helped resolve and advanced with the help of the Department of Health have been:

- . a private prosecution which led Toronto to close down a hazardous lead smelter in the Niagara Neighbourhood and subsequent cleanup of the site and nearby yards and homes;
- . decommissioning and cleanup of other industrial sites in the Riverdale and Junction Triangle neighbourhoods;

- . closure of the Commissioner Street incinerator once Department of Health reports verified public concerns about dioxin emissions;
- . negotiations to enclose the contaminated dredgeate disposal ponds on the Leslie Street Spit to protect nearby drinking water pipes;
- . advocacy to convince the Province to put a Lakefill Quality Assurance Program in place to stop the dumping of contaminated construction debris into Lake Ontario;
- . a report evaluating chemical contaminants in Toronto's Drinking Water and alternative treatments in response to public concern;
- . an environmental assessment of technology to dispose of PCB's on site;
- . evaluation and rejection of a proposal to mine the bottom of Lake Ontario for aggregate threatening drinking water intakes;
- . soil mapping and profiling to identify areas likely to require special handling due to historic contamination;
- . research and public educational materials on public health risks from all sources of lead contamination;
- . research for a city working group of concerned citizens that drafted a 1987 Waterfront Remedial Action Plan for cleanup of the region's waterfront. The recommendations made in this report laid the groundwork for initiatives that followed such as the Royal Commission on the Future of Toronto's Waterfront, the watershed cleanup initiatives on the Humber, Rouge and Don Rivers and the Oakridges Moraine;
- . work for over a decade on the international coalition Great Lakes United which led to a Department of Public Health representative being invited to represent Canada in negotiations which greatly strengthened the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement;
- . research and education leading to the City's adoption of a policy on the virtual elimination of the discharge of toxic chemicals into the environment;
- . discussions on the public health implications of privatizing Metro's water and sewage services; and
- . a collaborative effort between environmental and health communities to set up a Toronto Cancer Prevention Network and to write a handbook to help other communities do the same.

While it is impossible to quantify, it is clear that these many publicly generated concerns have led to preventative solutions which have saved huge amounts of health care dollars.

The new Toronto, one of the largest cities in North America, will be facing a myriad of new environmental and health challenges at a time when Provincial and Federal programmes are being down-loaded and diminished by cuts, deregulation, down-sizing and privatization of essential public services.

The recent Plastimet fire was for me an indication of where health protection responsibilities will lie in the new Ontario. The responsibility for the exposure of the neighbours and fire fighters to one of the largest known emissions of dioxin was attributed to the city's Medical Officer of Health when the provincial Minister exonerated his staff and the owners of Plastimet of responsibility. It is increasingly clear that municipalities will be inheriting more and more hands on responsibility for environmental and health protection.

Issues like climate change, population growth and globalization will bring many new problems which could well overwhelm dwindling public health resources. The ability of cities to cope with these challenges will depend on how much vision and preventative measures and expertise they have enshrined within their local government. Toronto has a lot to be proud of in how far-sighted their public health agencies have been in anticipating and acting on integrating environmental health into tangible public health programs. Today's Globe and Mail reports that a United Nations survey ranks our city as the world leader in combating greenhouse gases.

Today we are joining others to plea that the Public Health Department of the new city have an enhanced Environmental Protection Office with the resources and the expert staff to handle the new geographical boundaries of our city and the growing number of problems its citizens will face. That department's ability to anticipate and prevent problems will be directly related to how much access and participation they give to their citizens.

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