

Health costs of smog becoming more clear: forum

By **KIM ARNOTT**

Special to *The Champion*

Should a town bylaw be enacted to ban the use of Christmas lights prior to December 15?

Should tax credits be given to employers who organize car pools, or to individuals who can show they've used public transit as their primary form of transportation?

Should licencing fees be based on the weight and size of the car being licenced?

Those are just a few of the suggestions generated by about 60 local citizens who gathered recently in Oakville for a smog forum.

The goal of the evening was to inspire public suggestions to be taken to the 3rd annual GTA Smog Summit in Toronto June 21.

The ideas will be presented to politicians from all three level of government.

People are becoming increasingly concerned about poor air quality, participants

heard from Dr. Keith Stewart of the Toronto Environmental Alliance.

The links between smog and health and environmental problems are becoming increasingly clear, as are the costs of smog, he added.

Poor air quality is estimated to be responsible for 55 premature deaths in Halton every year, along with 400 hospital admissions and 1,425 emergency room visits.

Province-wide, smog costs the health care system about \$580 million each year. "This is not just an urban phenomena," said Dr. Stewart. "It's all over the province now. If you go up to the cottage, you're not necessarily getting away from this stuff."

He added that health problems escalate on high smog days, but that even healthy adults are harmed by moderately poor air quality.

"There is no safe level for air pollutants," said Dr. Stewart.

The main smog-causing culprits are

vehicles, electrical generating plants, industry, and home heating and air-conditioning systems.

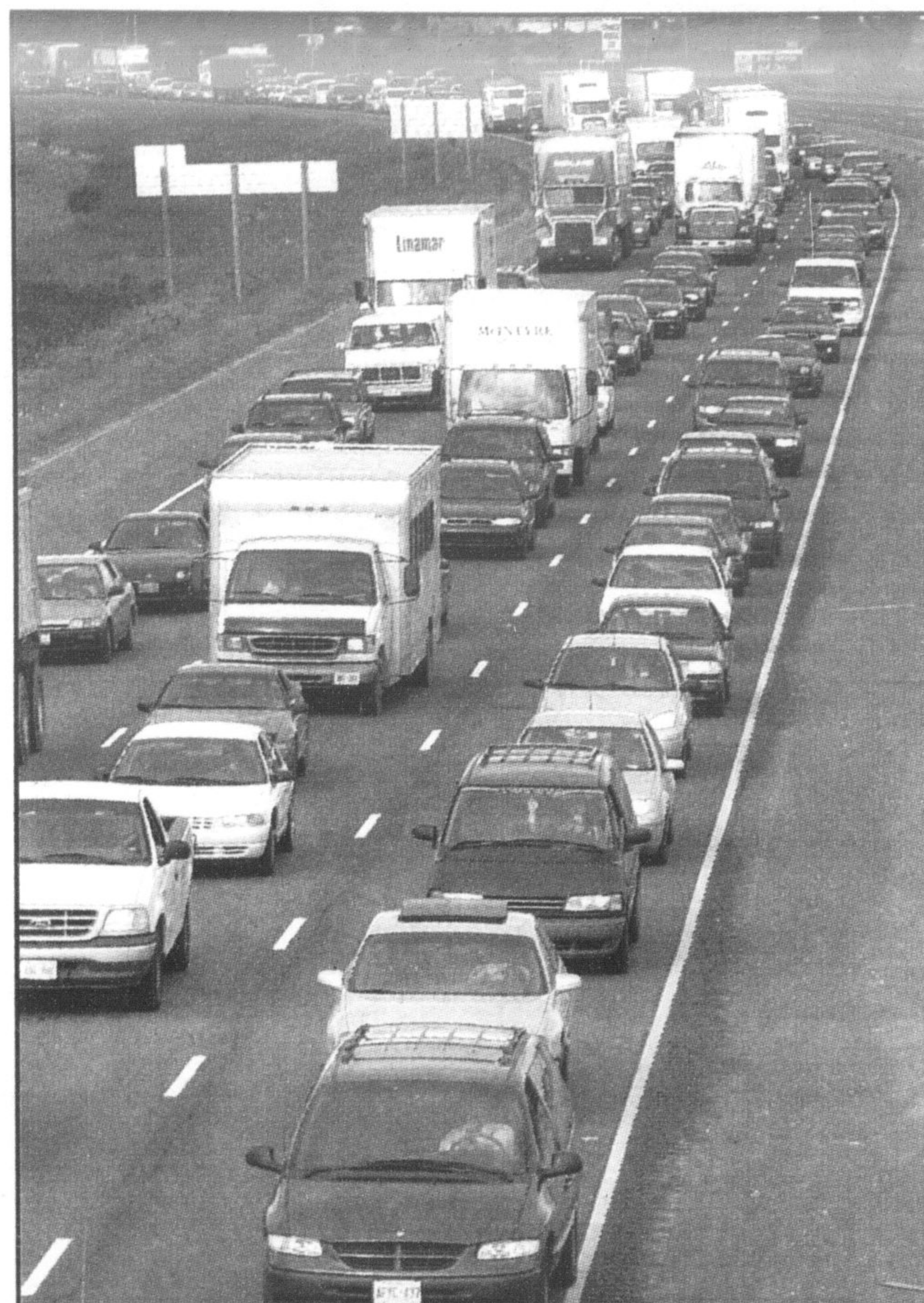
Electric generating plants alone are responsible for 20 per cent of emissions in the province, so energy conservation efforts can have a significant impact on lowering smog.

To significantly improve air quality in Ontario, Dr. Stewart suggested the need for a four-pronged action plan.

Firstly, urban sprawl must stop, and city design must accommodate other modes of transportation besides automobiles. As well, we must invest in public transit.

"Right now, we're designing communities for cars, not for people," said Dr. Stewart. "And without a public transit system that works, you force people into cars."

As well, he suggested phasing out all coal-fired electrical generating plants and increasing home, factory and transportation energy efficiency.



One the main smog-causing culprits are vehicles, like these here backed up on Hwy. 401.

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