

Halton may soon have heat alert system

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

The Halton Region Health Department is a step closer to having its first-ever response system that, if approved, will issue excessive heat alerts this summer.

The seven-point program would alert residents in Halton about extreme temperatures and what to do to protect one's self from the potentially-deadly heat.

Halton's proposed system was passed unanimously by the Region's health and social services committee Tuesday and will go before regional council this Wednesday.

In the summer of 1995, 500 people in Chicago died as a result of extreme heat. The tragedy has become the impetus for many municipalities across North America to institute a heat alert system, including Halton.

Halton's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal said the Region needs to have a program that follows its strategic plan about protecting the public from preventable illnesses, like heat stroke and dehydration.

"To me it makes a lot of sense we would be doing it also," he said.

Currently, Environment Canada issues a humidex warning when temperatures exceed 40 degrees Celsius for a day or 36 degrees Celsius for at least three days in a row. These high temperatures can be dangerous to the young, elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

Halton's first step in its proposed system would be to monitor the Environment Canada Web site for daily updates, which would include special weather warnings about heat or smog.

If temperatures were expected to be high, local health officials would consult the local weather office and, if needed, a trained meteorologist to get specific weather patterns in Halton.

From there the medical officer of health would make a decision as to whether a heat alert needed to be issued. If it did, media outlets and other groups, like hospitals or child day care centres, would be notified.

The public would be advised to seek places that have air conditioning, like shopping malls.

Jason Misner can be reached at jmisner@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

Mosquitoes sent for tests

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time next week.

Dr. Nosal noted dead crows were reported over the last few weeks but they weren't in good enough shape for testing.

Also, 15 mosquito traps have been set up throughout the region and some mosquitoes have already been sent to Brock University when testing is being done for West Nile, he said.

Those results could come back late next week, Dr. Nosal said.

In Halton last year, there were 59 probable and suspect cases of West Nile, resulting in 19 people requiring hospitalization. The number of cases was the second highest in the province, next to Toronto.

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