



Information Memo

To: City Council

From: Anthony Ambra, P.Eng., Commissioner,
Economic and Development Services Department

Item Number: INFO-26-13

Date: January 14, 2026

Subject: Province of Ontario's 2023 Air Quality Report

Ward: All Wards

File: 12-02-2146

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Report is to provide an overview of the Province's Air Quality in Ontario 2023 Report (the "2023 Report") and in particular, data recorded at the Air Quality Index ("A.Q.I.") monitoring station located at the former E.P. Taylor Stables at Ontario Tech University (285 Britannia Avenue West) in Oshawa (the "Site").

A copy of the 2023 Report is available at the following website:
<https://www.ontario.ca/document/air-quality-ontario-2023-report>

In 2014, staff were directed to provide Council with relevant information on the results and trends analysis by the Province from the A.Q.I. monitoring station located at the Site, as it becomes available.

2.0 Input From Other Sources

A copy of INFO-26-13, dated January 14, 2026 and the 2023 Report will be provided to the Oshawa Environmental Advisory Committee for information.

3.0 Analysis

3.1 Provincial Air Quality Monitoring

The Province, through the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks ("M.E.C.P."), operates a network of A.Q.I. monitoring stations across Ontario. In 2023, the M.E.C.P. monitored ambient air quality in real time at 37 A.Q.I. monitoring stations in Ontario, in collaboration with the federal National Air Pollutant Surveillance program. The M.E.C.P.'s A.Q.I. monitoring stations are sited to be representative of general population exposure and do not necessarily reflect the air quality in locations that are most influenced by local or industrial sources of air contaminants.

Staff note that there is only one A.Q.I. monitoring station in Durham Region, which is located on the Site. Prior to 2005, this station was located at Ritson Road Public School (300 Ritson Road South).

A.Q.I. monitoring stations generally measure common air pollutants associated with smog formation across the ambient air monitoring network. These key air pollutants can have adverse effects on human health and the environment, when detected at certain levels. These pollutants are:

- Ground level ozone;
- Fine particulate matter;
- Nitrogen dioxide;
- Carbon monoxide;
- Sulphur dioxide; and,
- Total Reduced Sulphur Compounds.

Information from the A.Q.I. monitoring stations is used by the M.E.C.P. to:

- Inform the public about Ontario's ambient air quality;
- Assess Ontario's air quality and evaluate long-term trends;
- Identify areas where criteria and standards are exceeded;
- Provide the basis for air quality policy/program development;
- Determine the impact from the United States and Canadian sources of Ontario's air quality;
- Provide scientists with air quality data to link environmental and human health effects to pollution levels; and,
- Provide smog advisories for public health protection.

The M.E.C.P.'s monitoring is continuous and can be viewed on a real time basis (hourly summaries) on the M.E.C.P.'s website. A link to the hourly air quality summaries in Ontario can be found at the following City website: <https://www.oshawa.ca/living-here/environment/air-quality/>

Overall, air quality in Ontario has improved over time as both ambient concentrations of common air pollutants and emissions have decreased. Generally, this improvement can be attributed to:

- Eliminating coal-fired power plants;
- Placing emissions caps on sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides;

- Developing new air standards and rules for industrial air emissions including:
 - New rules to regulate industrial sources of air pollution for petroleum and petrochemical industries;
 - New rules for regulating air contaminants for the metal finishers and foundries sectors;
 - Creating provincial air zones that will help direct government actions to maintain and improve air quality based on the unique circumstances of each area of the province; and,
 - More stringent sulphur dioxide air standards since it is a by-product of fossil fuel combustion and industrial smelting processes.

It is important to note that the 2023 Report includes references to the Canadian Ambient Air Quality Standards (“C.A.A.Q.S.”), which were published by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment in May 2013 to replace the Canada-wide standards for ozone and fine particulate matter. The purpose of the new non-binding standards is to promote continuous improvement in air quality monitoring across the country.

With respect to Oshawa, the 2023 Report indicates that Oshawa’s A.Q.I. monitoring station monitored three pollutants:

- Ozone;
- Fine particulate matter; and,
- Nitrogen dioxide.

The 2011 Air Quality Report noted that the other pollutants (i.e. sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and total reduced sulphur compounds) have reached background levels and are no longer required to be monitored at the Oshawa A.Q.I. monitoring station.

3.2 Ozone in Oshawa

3.2.1 Sources of Ozone

Ground-level ozone (denoted as O₃) is a colourless, odorless gas at typical ambient concentrations and is formed when nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compounds react in the presence of sunlight. The formation and transport of ozone is strongly dependent on weather conditions and emissions of chemicals that contribute to the formation of ozone (i.e. nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compounds). Ozone is a major component of smog and major sources of ozone include the transportation and industrial sectors and general solvent use.

3.2.2 Health and Environmental Effects

Ozone irritates the respiratory tract and eyes and exposure can result in chest tightness, coughing and wheezing. Children who are active outdoors during the summer, when ozone levels are highest, are particularly at risk of adverse effects. Individuals with pre-existing respiratory disorders, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease,

are also at risk. Ozone is also associated with increased hospital admissions and premature deaths.

3.2.3 Oshawa Trends

In 2023, Oshawa experienced an annual mean ozone level of 27.3 parts per billion (“p.p.b.”). As of 2025, the maximum ozone level according to the C.A.A.Q.S. afforded during an 8-hour span is 60 p.p.b., which is more stringent than the level of 62 p.p.b. which was effective starting in 2020. According to the provincial Air Quality Report which only measures for a 24-hour maximum, Oshawa’s ozone levels reached as high as 46.6 p.p.b. within a 24-hour time span, which comes in below the C.A.A.Q.S. maximum level.

Overall, the 10 year trend indicates that mean ozone levels have remained relatively consistent in Oshawa from 27.2 p.p.b. in 2014 to 27.3 p.p.b. in 2023. The overall annual mean ozone levels for Oshawa have been relatively steady with some increases and decreases year-to-year as shown below:

- 25.8 p.p.b. in 2018;
- 24.4 p.p.b. in 2019;
- 26.4 p.p.b. in 2020;
- 26.9 p.p.b. in 2021;
- 26.6 p.p.b. in 2022; and,
- 27.3 p.p.b. in 2023.

3.3 Fine Particular Matter in Oshawa

3.3.1 Sources of Fine Particular Matter

Airborne particulate is the general term used to describe a mixture of microscopic solid particles and liquid droplets suspended in the air. Particulate matter (“P.M.”) includes aerosols, smoke, fumes, dust, fly ash and pollen. Fine particulate matter (denoted as P.M.2.5) is less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, which is approximately 30 times smaller than the average diameter of a human hair.

Fine particulate matter consists of primary and secondary P.M.2.5. Primary P.M.2.5 is emitted directly into the atmosphere and major sources include residential fireplaces, wood stoves, motor vehicles, smelters, power plants, industrial facilities, agricultural burning and forest fires. Secondary P.M.2.5 is formed indirectly in the atmosphere through a series of complex chemical reactions involving gases such as nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide.

3.3.2 Health and Environmental Impacts

Fine particulate matter can have various negative health effects, especially on the respiratory and cardiovascular systems. Exposure to fine particulate matter is associated with increased hospital admissions and emergency room visits, as well as death from heart or lung diseases. Both long and short-term particle exposures have been linked to health issues. Individuals with heart or lung diseases, children and older adults are particularly sensitive to this pollutant.

3.3.3 Oshawa Trends

In 2023, Oshawa experienced a mean fine particulate matter level of 7.6 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), coming in below the C.A.A.Q.S. annual standard level of 8.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. However, according to the 2023 report, on eight (8) occasions over the year, Oshawa exceeded the 24 hour maximum reference level standard of 27 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. This can largely be attributed to the 2023 wildfires which saw approximately 15 million hectares of forest area burn across Canada.

Overall, the 10-year trend indicates that fine particulate matter levels have generally decreased from 7.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2014 to 7.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2023. Fine particulate matter levels increased in 2023 as a result of the fires, but have been relatively stable between 2018 and 2023 with minor variances, as shown below;

- 6.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2018;
- 6.1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2019;
- 6.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2020;
- 6.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2021;
- 5.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2022; and,
- 7.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2023.

3.4 Nitrogen Dioxide in Oshawa

3.4.1 Sources of Nitrogen Dioxide

Nitrogen dioxide is a reddish-brown gas with a pungent odour, which transforms in the atmosphere to form gaseous nitric acid and nitrates. Nitrogen dioxide plays a major role in atmospheric reactions that produce ground-level ozone, as well as reactions with other gaseous contaminants (i.e. sulphur dioxide, ammonia and volatile organic compounds) leading to the formation of fine particulate matter.

The transportation sector is the main source of nitrogen dioxide in Ontario. In addition, combustion or burning of carbon-based materials (e.g. wood, gasoline, etc.) in air produces nitrogen oxides, of which nitrogen dioxide is a component.

3.4.2 Health and Environmental Impacts

Nitrogen dioxide can irritate the lungs and lower resistance to respiratory infection, especially in individuals with asthma and bronchitis. Nitrogen dioxide chemically transforms into nitric acid in the atmosphere and, when deposited, contributes to the acidification of lakes and soils in Ontario. Nitric acid can also corrode metals, fade fabrics, degrade rubber and damage trees and crops.

3.4.3 Oshawa Trends

In 2023, Oshawa experienced a mean nitrogen dioxide level of 3.6 p.p.b., which is well below the C.A.A.Q.S. annual reference level of 17.0 p.p.b.

Overall, the 10 year trend indicates that nitrogen dioxide levels have decreased 47.1% from 6.8 p.p.b. in 2014 to 3.6 p.p.b. in 2023. Other than marginal decimal increases in some years, the overall annual mean of nitrogen dioxide levels has generally remained consistent, as shown below:

- 3.8 p.p.b. in 2018;
- 3.5 p.p.b. in 2019;
- 3.6 p.p.b. in 2020;
- 3.4 p.p.b. in 2021;
- 3.7 p.p.b. in 2022; and,
- 3.6 p.p.b. in 2023.

3.5 2023 Air Quality Report Summary

Based on the 2023 Report, the three pollutants currently being measured in Oshawa as noted above have continued to trend downwards or remain consistent in terms of pollutant levels over the course of the last ten years. This is an encouraging statistic from an environmental and sustainability perspective, showing that even while Oshawa is experiencing exponential growth and development in many of its sectors, the City's mean air quality continues to improve. Most importantly, given some of the health risks associated with these pollutants, there is a continued benefit to the overall community as local businesses, community members and the City alike, continue do their part to ensure safe air quality levels. 2023 was an unprecedented year with respect to wildfires, with approximately 15 million hectares of forest burned across Canada, resulting in higher concentration levels of some pollutants mentioned above. In 2023, Ontario issued 13 air quality alerts known as Special Air Quality Statements ("S.A.Q.S."), which covered 55 days. Seven (7) of these S.A.Q.S. were issued due to forecasts of elevated PM_{2.5} concentrations from wildfire smoke, accounting for 49 of those 55 days.

4.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this Report.

5.0 Relationship to the Oshawa Strategic Plan

This Report responds to the Oshawa Strategic Plan Priority Area:

“Care: Safe and Sustainable Environment” with the goal to enhance emergency preparedness and response, including preparing for potential climate emergencies and significant weather events.



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