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## **Health report to get 'low-profile' release**

By Bill Curry

OTTAWA -- The Conservative government is planning a quiet release for a major Health Canada report that warns of the harmful impact of climate change on the health of Canadians, particularly the young, elderly and aboriginals.

Should the department follow through with its communications plan, it will be the second time this year that the government has taken such an approach with a major climate-change study.

Those involved with the report were informed in a July 3 conference call that the government is preparing a "low-profile release" on the Health Canada website, rather than launching the report with major media fanfare, sources told The Globe and Mail.

The Health Canada report is called Human Health in a Changing Climate: A Canadian Assessment of Vulnerabilities and Adaptive Capacity. It is more than 500 pages long and has been ready for several months.

McMaster University chemistry professor Brian McCarry, who chairs a group called Clean Air Hamilton, said the dangers of global warming and fossil fuels on human health deserve far more attention, not less.

"Certainly, the stance taken by this government has been to keep climate change in a low-profile format," he said. "Unfortunately, Canada and the U.S. are almost singular in the world now as being not quite climate-change deniers, but they're not putting much emphasis on [it.]"

Canadian scientists and climate experts worked for months on a similar major study last year for Natural Resources Canada called >From Impacts to Adaptation, which warned of the specific impacts of climate change for each region of the country.

The release of that report was delayed for several months before being posted in a hard-to-find section of the Natural Resources Canada website. As a result, the report received little media coverage, frustrating many of the public servants, scientists and academics who worked on it.

Similar frustration is now beginning to surface over the government's handling of the Health Canada study.

Health Minister Tony Clement's press secretary, Laryssa Waler, issued a brief response yesterday to questions about the department's communications plan. "Health Canada is preparing the report for release. Once it's ready, it will be released," she said in an e-mail.

Peter Berry, Health Canada's senior policy analyst for climate change and health, who was on the July 3 conference call discussing the communications plan for releasing the report, offered an outline of the study during a February presentation to Clean Air Hamilton.

At that time, Dr. Berry said the report would be released in the spring. It is expected to warn of the health dangers of longer and hotter heat waves on the elderly and children, while saying that changing vegetation will affect the traditional ways of northern aboriginals.

Dr. Berry's presentation included a quotation about how society will only act to avoid the effects of climate change if it is aware of the possible negative consequences.

Environmentalist Dale Marshall of the David Suzuki Foundation, who has been critical of what he describes as the Conservative government's "weak" climate-change policies, offered an exasperated sigh yesterday when told of the government's plans.

"If this government cared about climate change," he said, "then it would highlight these reports and use them as a way of engaging Canadians on the importance of addressing the issue."