

# City looking at 3 options to deal with air quality

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THE City of Winnipeg is exploring ways to cope with poor air quality, months after wildfire smoke cast a smelly haze over Winnipeg.

"Last year, we really saw that wildfire smoke create more issues in the city than we've seen before and more concern and more awareness, as we know, with climate change," Jason Shaw, Winnipeg's assistant chief of emergency management, told council's protection and community services committee on Friday. "We know the air quality is going to continue being more of a concern."

Three options are up for discussion.

Shaw said the city has reached out to Manitoba Health, Health Canada and other government officials to determine how best to cope with the issue. That's led the city to consider more air quality monitoring, emergency responses and guidelines.

For example, the city is checking out if it would be feasible to set up "clean air shelters."

"We're looking at potentially doing a pilot project with the federal government on clean air shelters... It looks like maybe working with our community clubs and some of our recreation centres to see what would it take to turn them into clean air shelters, what level of filtration, what level of (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system) support they would need (to do that)," said Shaw.

The city will consider obtaining a series of small, portable air-quality monitors, which Shaw said can detect very small particles.

"We might be able to work with the province on a pilot project to put a cadre of these out throughout the city to be able to get that better balance of air monitoring," he said.

Currently, the city has three air-quality monitors; two downtown and one in East Kildonan, Shaw said.

Finally, the city is researching possible policy changes that could set guidelines for when the city should shut down services that are more risky when air quality is poor.

"We want to be able to work with the federal government and the provincial government to determine at what level (it is) dangerous," said Shaw.

In July 2021, the city closed outdoor pools, wading pools and outdoor recreation programs for about two days due to poor air quality, as smoke from multiple wildfires settled over the city.

The closures were intended to protect public health, after the level of pollution was deemed to pose a "very high risk." At the time, Environment Canada warned the condition of the air could cause sore eyes, tears, coughing and a runny nose, and urged Winnipeggers to limit outdoor activity.

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Born and raised in Winnipeg, Joyanne loves to tell the stories of this city, especially when politics is involved. Joyanne became the city hall reporter for the Winnipeg Free Press in early 2020.