

## Ambulance delays worry mayor

Policy of waiting for police should be examined, Miller says

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Mayor David Miller expressed concerns yesterday about ambulance delays, saying a policy that enables paramedics to wait for police before responding should be examined after a recent heart-attack death.

"I'm concerned that what happened might possibly indicate weaknesses in the system well beyond the stresses brought about by a strike and I think it's important that we have an outside investigation so Torontonians know that it is impartial," Mayor Miller told reporters.

The Mayor re-emerged after four days of silence at a press conference in which he also said the city will seek "every legal remedy," including injunctions, to stop strikers from blocking city workers who want to cross the picket line.

Mr. Miller told reporters it was "extremely important" that the Ministry of Health was investigating the death of Jim Hearst. On June 25, four days into the civic workers' strike, Mr. Hearst collapsed in the lobby of his downtown apartment. Witnesses said paramedics took about 40 minutes to reach him while he died of an apparent heart attack.

Bruce Farr, Toronto's Chief of Emergency Medical Services, said that paramedics arrived within nine minutes of the call, but were "staged" outside, or waiting for police, because of an undisclosed "health and safety" concern. According to Police Chief Bill Blair, two other ambulances were also "staged" in the city on other calls at the same time.

The Mayor appeared at times unsettled by reporters' questions at City Hall yesterday. Outside, protestors who were frustrated by the 26-day-old strike chanted, "Toronto's had enough" while pickets circled the entrance. Earlier, demonstrators with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty stormed Mr. Miller's office, upset about reduced access to social assistance during the strike.

The Mayor acknowledged picketers have prevented some unionized employees in the city's social services department from returning to work.

"There have been a number of instances of pickets not complying with the law," he said. "Where there is evidence, we will pursue every available remedy including injunctions to ensure that Torontonians and city workers have proper and safe access to the work sites."

The city has already been granted two injunctions during the strike: one to allow workers to remove illegally dumped waste from outside of the Ingram Transfer Station, and another so that they could spray the Christie Pits temporary dump with pesticides.

Some unionized workers have unsuccessfully tried to cross the picket line this week to return to jobs at social services offices in Scarborough and Etobicoke.



*Tim Fraser For National Post*

*Mayor David Miller says the strike is hurting the city's "most vulnerable."*

"This is a strike against the most vulnerable Torontonians, including social assistance recipients and children," the Mayor told the news conference.

"Negotiations are continuing but I have to say that I am extremely frustrated at the very slow pace of negotiations after the fair and reasonable offer the city made last week."

Mark Ferguson, president of Toronto Civic Employees Union Local 416 CUPE, said the strike might not have happened had the city presented the offer it had tabled last week, which "gave us something to work with."

"There has been nothing fair about the city's proposals. Taking away our members' accumulative sick plan is a huge concession," he said. "And the city is still trying to force senior employees out the door on layoff while junior employees remain on the job."

For his part, Mr. Miller said ending the strike by asking the province to enact back-to-work legislation would be "a significant error."

"Back-to-work legislation results in arbitrated settlements. During the last arbitration, the settlement that was given was about 3%. A 3% settlement right now each year would not be affordable by the city ... would probably mean that we would be required to cut services and possibly lay off the very people who got the 3%."