



Smog advisories help Ontarians cope with increased pollution

A trio of smog advisory health messages will help patients weather the dog days of summer. Developed by the Ontario Medical Association (OMA), the 1-page advisories are aimed at smog-sensitive people, children, and people working and exercising outdoors (see www.oma.org). In Ontario, smog causes respiratory difficulties for about 7% of the population and triggers about 1800 premature deaths annually.

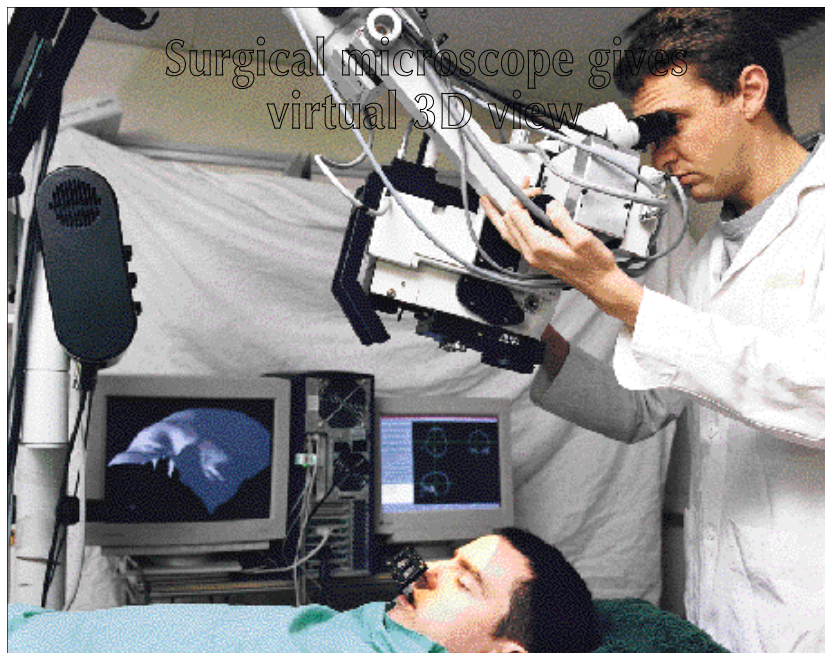
"These are the first comprehensive, province-wide documents of their type," says Dr. Ted Boadway, executive director of the OMA Health Policy Department. The

messages, which focus on raising awareness and reducing exposure, are part of the OMA's 4-part plan to reduce ground level ozone levels (see www.oma.org/phealth/ground.htm).

The advisories couldn't have come at a more opportune time in Ontario. In the past year, sulphur emissions have increased by 40%, primarily because of an increase in the use of coal-fired electricity after several nuclear power plants were shut down. "[The increase] is shocking in the face of knowing what it's doing and knowing you can't fix it," says Boadway.

The advisories came on the heels of the federal government's decision to reduce the level of sulphur in fuel by more than 90%. Current national levels are about 350 parts per million (500 ppm in Ontario) but in June the federal government said oil refineries must reduce the rate to 30 ppm by January 2005. The US Environmental Protection Agency told its refiners to make the same reduction by 2004.

The OMA was one of many lobby groups, including the CMA and 130 municipalities across Canada, that were urging Ottawa to slash emissions. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*



London Press Service

A new surgical microscope uses virtual reality to help surgeons see beneath the surface. With the binocular microscope, stereo images are superimposed, layer by layer, to provide a 3D image of the structures beneath the surface. The stereo-augmented reality-display microscope, developed by radiologists and scientists at the University College of London in England, also has an infrared tracking system to ensure that the virtual image exactly matches the part of the patient under the microscope.

High praise indeed for CMAJ

Do doctors care about books? This is precisely the question posed in a recent editorial in *The Lancet* (1999;353:1719). In a brief overview of book review sections in major journals such as *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Annals of Internal Medicine*, *JAMA* and *BMJ*, *The Lancet* editorial concluded that, "present company necessarily being excluded," top honours should go to the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* and the editor of its review section — The Left Atrium — Anne Marie Todkill.

According to the editorial: "She has created a cushioned corner for all those who desire the company of words and who wish to escape the dutiful brutalities of other worthy periodicals."