

Death's possible Toronto strike links to be probed

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In a move that appears to be an attempt to deflect inquiries and criticism, the City of Toronto has asked the province to investigate the death of a Toronto man, in which some have said the city's public service strike may have played a role.

The city says because of the investigation it will have "no further comment" about the death.

In a news release on Thursday morning the city said it has "requested the Ontario Ministry of Health to conduct an investigation into the call for Emergency Medical Services that took place on June 25 at 40 Alexander St."

It was at that location that James Hearst, 50, died and there have been suggestions the strike by civic workers may have contributed to the death.

The news release said the ministry "has confirmed receipt of the request and will immediately begin the investigation."

A series of 911 calls failed to produce paramedics — even though the EMS chief told reporters on Tuesday that an ambulance was on the scene within nine minutes.

It took 35 minutes for paramedics to arrive and treat Hearst who had collapsed in the lobby of his apartment building in downtown Toronto.

Hearst's partner Alejandro Martinez suggested the emergency medical service delay may have been due to the strike by city workers which began on June 22.

"I mean, how long does it take 911 to arrive?" he told CBC News. "I live a half-block from a fire station, three long blocks from the major hospitals."

The city's EMS workers are operating at 75 per cent capacity because of the strike.

The head of Toronto's EMS denied suggestions that the labour disruption was to blame for Hearst's death, or for delays in responding to any 911 calls.

EMS chief Bruce Farr said the initial 911 call about Hearst did not indicate a "life-threatening" situation.

Ambulance workers responded within the usual time frame for such calls, he said.

Farr said paramedics didn't enter the building due to a "health and safety concerns."

There has been no explanation what those health and safety concerns might have been.