

## Family blames city workers' strike for death

Say ambulance took too long to respond

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CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF

Jim Hearst's loved ones blame the city workers' strike for his death by an apparent heart attack, saying an ambulance did not come to his aid for at least 30 minutes despite three 911 calls.

The city says ambulance response times for high-priority urgent calls have not been affected by the walkout, even though under an essential services agreement the service is running at 75 per cent staffing.

A city spokesman said yesterday he was unable to provide details on Hearst's case despite first being asked about it last Thursday.

Hearst was stricken on June 25. The 50-year-old had walked into his apartment building near Yonge and Wellesley Sts. just after 11 p.m. when he fell and hit his head.

Neighbours rushed to help and called 911, said Hearst's partner of eight years, Alejandro Martinez, who was away in New York at the time.

A few minutes later, Garrett Flynn and Manuel Rodriguez wandered into the building on Alexander St. and rushed to help. They were told an ambulance had been called and Rodriguez called building security. Within minutes, a security guard from Intelligarde arrived.

People were sent to different doors to watch for EMS officials. After about 10 minutes, Rodriguez and Flynn, who were joined by a nurse, started performing CPR.

"His face was turning purple and red. I thought it was not a good signal," Rodriguez said, adding the Intelligarde officer contacted 911 again to say that the victim was turning blue. After another 10 minutes, Hearst stopped moving and his eyes closed and opened. Then they stayed open.

The Intelligarde officer called 911 again to say there was no pulse.

Rodriguez estimates the paramedics finally arrived at 11:45 p.m.

"They walked slow like they were in high school talking with colleagues," he said, adding one told Flynn to continue with the CPR.

"They took so long."

Martinez, 31, who has not contacted EMS officials or city politicians with his complaints, said he wants "people to know that this strike is affecting not just garbage collection and pools.



RENÉ JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR

*Alejandro Martinez says the ambulance took at least half an hour to get to partner Jim Hearst, seen in photo. "I don't want to see this happen again."*

"I don't want to see this happen again."

City spokesman Kevin Sack said last week that the city is looking at the case, but said staff needs time to pull records, including 911 tapes. Because of privacy rules, he said the city is limited in how it can respond to questions without a signed release from the patient's family.

While not discussing the Hearst case in particular, Sack said, "Every indication is that the city has had no strike-related EMS response issues on calls like this."

Even though the *Star* contacted the city for comment last Thursday, as of yesterday Sack had no additional information.

It is unclear what exactly the people who called 911 from Hearst's building told ambulance dispatchers. Callers who provide unclear or incorrect information can affect how a call is prioritized.

A week after the strike began, EMS chief Bruce Farr said that ambulance response times for life-threatening calls continue to be in the same range as before the strike.

"We're still in the 8 1/2 to 9-minute range," Farr said during a June 29 briefing. The Intelligarde employee who tried to help Hearst said she couldn't comment on the incident. Intelligarde president Ross McLeod also declined to comment.

Mark Ferguson, who heads the union local representing paramedics, said he was unaware of the incident but that it highlights staffing problems.

"Certainly we've been warning the City of Toronto for quite some time that staffing levels are perilously low," he said.

"So we see this as an instance that could happen at any time, 365 days a year, not necessarily relating to the strike at all."