

## 'Staging' by EMS workers needs review, mayor says

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Mayor David Miller says he's "concerned" the ambulance response in the Jim Hearst case could indicate "weaknesses" in the city's Emergency Medical Services system.

Hearst had a heart attack and died in his Alexander St. apartment building June 25. Witnesses and security recordings indicate it took EMS more than 30 minutes and several 911 calls before he was attended to in the main floor hallway.

After arriving, the crew waited for police backup, which is permitted under a process known as "staging." EMS workers can stage if they believe their "health and safety" are at risk. Instances when this might occur are 911 calls involving a fight, assault or someone with a weapon.

The initial 911 call in the Hearst case, however, was for a man who had bumped his head and was bleeding, an EMS official said this week. It's not clear what concerns the crew may have had that night.

EMS Chief Bruce Farr maintains the crew responded in nine minutes. Though they staged, they put aside their concerns and attended to Hearst when they later learned he had stopped breathing.

Farr says the response time was in no way connected to Toronto's city workers' strike.

Miller told reporters yesterday at City Hall: "I'm concerned what happened might possibly indicate weaknesses in the system well beyond the stresses brought about by a strike." He said he believes the staging process is one of the areas that require examination.

Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair waded into the debate, saying two ambulance crews in other parts of the city also staged on the night Hearst died.

"I'm concerned about that (Hearst) incident because the consequences were significant," Blair said yesterday.

Ontario's Ministry of Health has launched an investigation into the Hearst case, and Toronto police have obtained a recording of radio calls made by the building's security.

Glen Gilles, executive secretary of the Toronto Paramedic Association, which is not a union, says staging isn't something taken lightly by EMS workers.

"Every time we stage we're subject to an internal review," he said.