

## Union sets deadline for deal

Jul 24, 2009 06:36 PM

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Calling himself a patient man who has come to the end of his rope, the head of one of Toronto's striking unions has threatened to walk out of talks if a tentative agreement with the city is not reached within 48 hours.

In a surprising move, Mark Ferguson, president of local 416, explained to reporters this afternoon that he is frustrated with the pace of negotiations in the 33-day-old strike.

He imposed the deadline of midnight Sunday and said he has communicated that deadline to the city's negotiators.

Ferguson said "a vast array" of issues remain unresolved, including the key ones of bankable sick days and wages.

A spokesperson for CUPE Local 79, the other striking union, said tonight there are no plans to impose a 48-hour deadline on the city.

"We're continuing to focus on reaching a settlement," said CUPE national spokesperson Robert Lamoureux.

He added that Local 79 believes it's "possible to reach a settlement this weekend."

Earlier today, the city filed an application seeking to increase the number of ambulances on the street during the strike, citing an "inappropriate" delay of 53 additional seconds in response times to high priority calls.

The city announced it has filed an application to the Ontario Labour Relations Board seeking an increase of 22 ambulances on weekdays, and 27 more on weekend days, both for 24-hour periods.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Chief Bruce Farr told reporters today that after reviewing 26,000 EMS calls handled during the strike, it's been determined that it's now taking 53 more seconds to respond to high priority calls than it did before the strike, an increase Farr called "inappropriate."

High priority calls include chest pains or cardiac-related events, and difficulty breathing.

Under an essential services agreement Toronto EMS — which is on strike — is operating at 75 per cent capacity.

Farr said the application is not related to the June 25 death of Jim Hearst, who witnesses say EMS took over 30 minutes to attend to.

According to previous statements made by Farr, paramedics were outside Heart's apartment in nine minutes, but delayed entering because they had "health and safety" concerns. The Hearst case is under investigation by Ontario's Ministry of Health.



NATHAN DENETTE/THE CANADIAN PRESS

*Striking workers picket at Bermondsey Transfer Station June 30, 2009.*

In other developments today, the city announced the opening of two new temporary drop-off sites for garbage, one at Amesbury Arena, near Black Creek and Lawrence Ave. W., and Otter Creek Centre, near Lawrence Ave. W. and Avenue Rd.

They'll open at 7 a.m. tomorrow while two existing sites, Caledonia Park, near Caledonia and Lawrence, and North Toronto Memorial, near Eglinton and Oriole Parkway, will close tonight at 7.

The city is also in court today seeking two injunctions. One to preventing picketers from blocking or delaying workers and clients from entering a social services office in Etobicoke, the other prohibiting strikers from blocking cleanup efforts by the city of illegal dumping at Bluffer's Park in Scarborough.