

Province to probe case of Toronto man who died after waiting for ambulance

Family and friends of James Hearst, 59, cite the strike in the delay; EMS chief says labour dispute isn't to blame

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The Ontario Ministry of Health will investigate why Toronto paramedics took more than half an hour to respond to a 911 call for a man who had fallen, was bleeding from the head and died while waiting for emergency medical help.

Bruce Farr, chief of Toronto Emergency Medical Services, made the request for the ministry's assistance yesterday amidst growing pressure to explain why paramedics sat outside an Alexander Street apartment building as two good Samaritans and a security guard frantically administered CPR to James (Jim) Hearst, 59.



The Health Ministry's investigation adds to efforts by Toronto police and the coroner's office to make sense of the circumstances preceding Mr. Hearst's death on June 25.

Ministry officials, who can compel people to hand over evidence, will review the 911 calls and investigate the actions of the paramedics, a spokesman said.

There is no deadline for completing the probe, but the ministry will try to finish it as quickly as possible, the spokesman said.

Alejandro Martinez Ramirez, 31, Mr. Hearst's common-law partner of eight years, said he was suspicious of an internal EMS investigation and is grateful to have the ministry involved.

"I'm feeling a little bit better knowing there's going to be an independent branch of the government investigating the case and not the EMS people doing their own internal investigation," Mr. Martinez Ramirez said.

However, Mr. Martinez Ramirez questioned whether the Ministry of Health is the appropriate body to lead such an investigation.

"The police, the courts should be investigating it, the department of justice," he said.

But, he conceded, "The more people get involved, the better."

EMS officials have refused to provide details of what happened on June 25, citing the internal investigation. This includes what time dispatchers received the initial call for help and what time paramedics entered the building.

It is even unclear whether paramedics or firefighters were the first emergency responders to come to Mr. Hearst's aid.

On Tuesday, Mr. Farr raised questions when he told reporters that paramedics were on the scene within nine minutes of receiving the initial 911 call from a bystander reporting that a man had fallen and was bleeding from the head.

But Mr. Farr said that, because of concerns for their own health and safety, the paramedics chose to wait until

police arrived before entering the building.

Mr. Farr would not explain the paramedics' concerns.

With a report from Karen □ Howlett