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SFU ponders Olympic research proposals

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Tim Takaro, a health sciences researcher at Simon Fraser University, says an upcoming workshop will be an invaluable source of research ideas on the health and environmental impact of the Olympic games.

Takaro oversees the planning for the British Columbia Environmental and Occupational Health Research Network's (BCEOHRN) spring workshop on Friday, May 29, 9 a.m.

-4:30 p.m. at SFU's Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue in Vancouver.

Three academic researchers will discuss health and environmental lessons learned from the Games in Beijing and Atlanta.

Then, professors and students from SFU and five other Lower Mainland universities and colleges will lead brainstorming sessions about 2010 Games-related research proposals.

'One of the key services that research-based universities provide is an impartial analysis of the health implications of major social and economic events such as the Olympic games,' says Takaro, the workshop's moderator.

'The credibility of the Olympics, which is largely a business as well as a sports event, is very important to the public and governments. For example, that's why Vancouver Olympic organizers are cooperating with the David Suzuki Foundation about carbon emissions. University research can also provide a credible critique of Olympic size claims.'

Junfeng (Jim) Zhang, an environmental and occupational health professor at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, is one of the workshop speakers. He will present new research evaluating the impact of Beijing's air pollution clean up for its 2008 Olympic games.

'We expect the health benefit of such a clean up in a major city to be quite significant,' says Takaro, an environmental and occupational health expert.

Jennifer Peel, an assistant professor of epidemiology at Colorado State University, will present her research analysis of decreased respiratory complaints due to traffic reductions during the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.

'The results of the Olympic games-related studies in Beijing and Atlanta will generate new leads on where we should go in researching effective ways to study traffic and air pollution during Vancouver's games,' says Takaro.

Ryan Allen, an SFU health sciences assistant professor whose doctoral research evaluated personal exposure to air pollution in the Seattle area, will lead a brainstorming session on traffic-related pollution.

Other research ideas to be discussed include: the Games' impact on physical activity across Canada and North America, Lower Mainland health-care surge capacity and the impact of the 2010 Olympics on B.C. youth.

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