

# Rabies scourge hits Halton

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT  
The Herald

Rabies. It causes normally fearful wild animals to be either docile or demonic and it's leaving its fearful mark in Halton.

Just last week, three people walking down Lakeshore Rd. in Burlington were attacked by a small, grey, tabby cat and Halton's Health Department suspects it was rabid.

In June this year, an Acton man was exposed to the rabies virus when saliva from an infected animal entered open cuts on his hands. He got the saliva from his dog who had fought with and killed a rabid raccoon.

"It's that time of year again," says Halton's environmental health superintendent, Dave Stronach. "We're not sure why fall and winter are traditionally bad for rabies but it has to do with the fox population."

What's unusual about this year's rabies epidemic is where rabid animals are turning up.

Traditionally, rabies is more prevalent in the rural areas of North Halton said Mr. Stronach but this year, most of the rabid animal sightings have been in the populated areas of Burlington and Oakville.

Last year, 33 sightings of rabid animals were reported of which 13 were in Halton Hills. Out of that number, there were 19 foxes, four skunks, one dog, one cat, five livestock (horses and cattle) two raccoons and one wolf. In 1989, 24 rabid animals were reported including 11 foxes, 10 skunks, one livestock, one bat and one cat.

"Foxes are the number one carriers, followed by skunks," said Mr. Stronach. He explained the rabies virus in Canada seems to favor foxes while another strain in the United States is hitting raccoons.

The most frightening rabies carrier is a bat said Mr. Stronach. Unlike other animals which always die when infected with rabies, bats carry the deadly virus without exhibiting the rabies symptoms.

Rabies, a disease which attacks the brain and central nervous

system, has two categories of symptoms: dumb and furious. Furious is the most recognizable as the rabid animal often foams at the mouth and runs around in a frenzy, attacking everything.

"The rabid cat in Burlington exhibited signs of furious rabies as it was running around and biting pets, people, sticks and fences," said Mr. Stronach.

The other rabid symptom, termed dumb, makes normally timid animals docile and easy to approach.

-if you see a wild or stray animal behaving strangely, report it your local humane society or animal shelter

-if you are bitten by an animal, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, apply an antiseptic and report the incident to the Health Department or to your doctor



Sonny, the cat receives his annual rabies immunization vaccine from Halton Hills Vet Clinic veterinarian Tony Pacevicius and veterinary assistant Leslie Johnston. Fall and winter is a

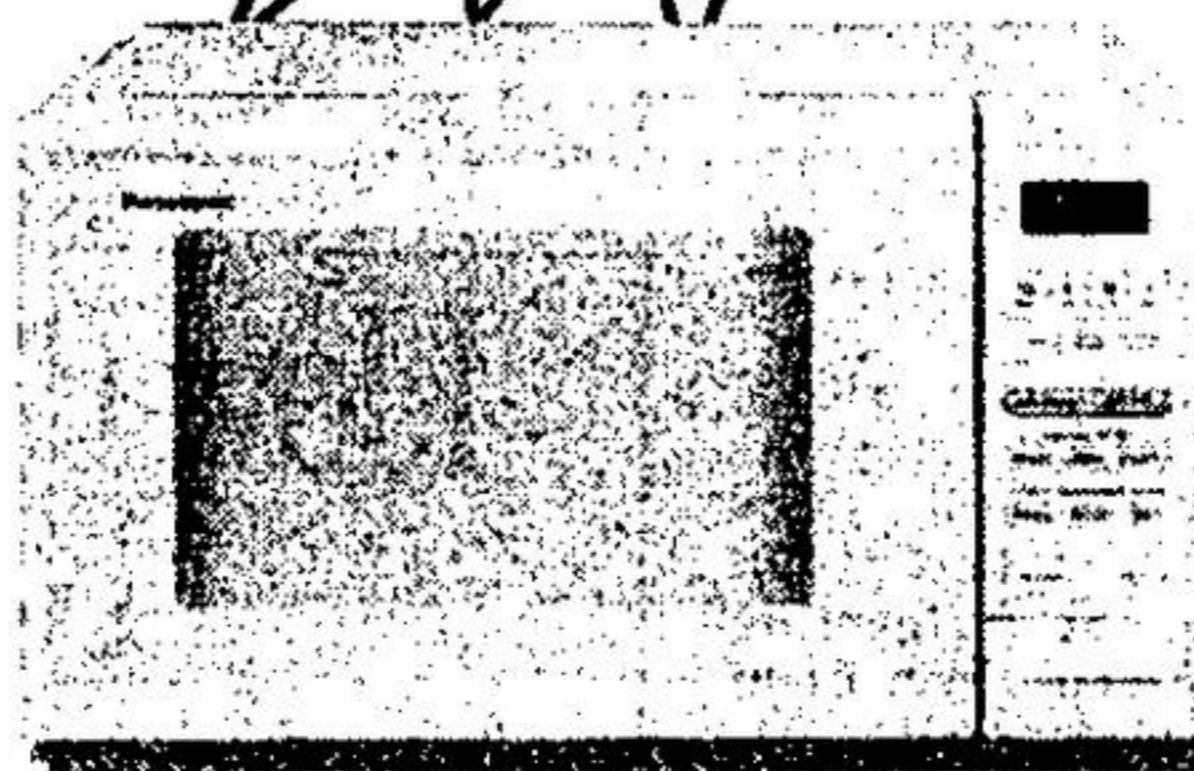
traditionally bad time for rabies and the Halton Health Department is urging people to take precautions. (Herald Photo)

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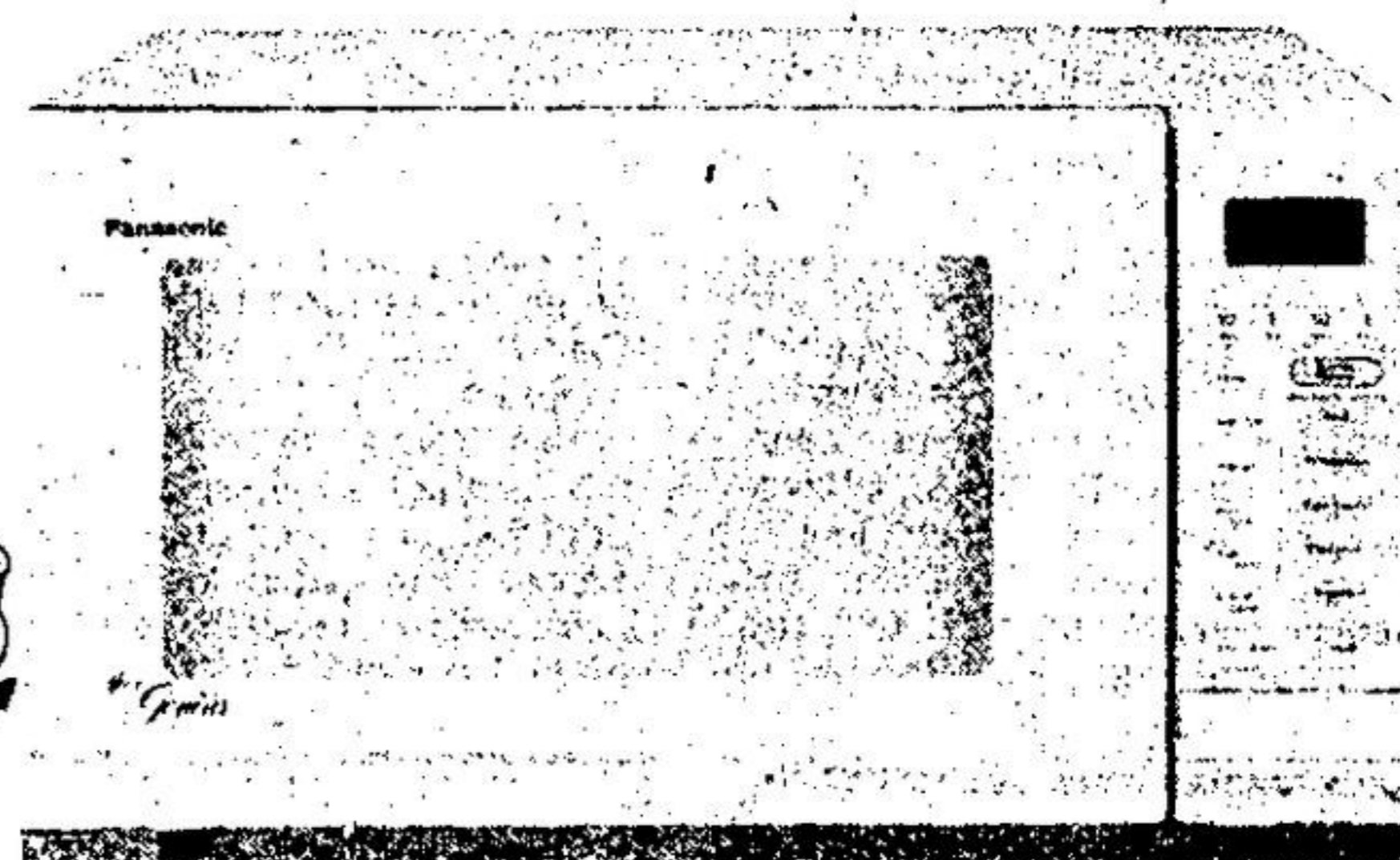


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