

Georgetown dairy producer to test emergency siren Sept. 28

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If you live within a two-kilometre radius of the Saputo plant at 279 Guelph St. in Georgetown and hear a loud siren - take cover and remain indoors.

That's the message from the Halton Hills Fire Department (HHFD) after giving a report and presentation to council on Aug. 28 about the federally mandated safety initiative.

A live test of the siren to give residents an idea of what the siren will sound like once activated is scheduled for Sept. 28. The IFP has not yet been informed of the exact time of the test. The HHFD are advising residents this is only a test and no action on there part will be required during the test.

In 2013, Saputo Dairy Products Canada informed the town and HHFD that regulations under the federal Environmental Pro-

tection Act required the company to install a siren in case of an ammonia leak at its plant in Georgetown.

According to the presentation to council given by Deputy Chief Harry Oliveri, ammonia is a mostly safe chemical used as a cooling and refrigeration agent in the production of dairy products. Saputo stores a large amount of ammonia in tanks on-site at the plant.

Ammonia is a colourless gas which is lighter than air and can burn the skin or cause respiratory distress if inhaled in large enough quantities.

Saputo and HHFD have been working together since 2013 to implement an emergency notification and response program to ensure the necessary co-ordination of emergency services in the unlikely event of a large leak.

"Where (the legislation) applies to Saputo is because of the quantity (of



Graeme Frisque/Metroland

Georgetown dairy producer is working with the Halton Hills Fire Department on an emergency siren plan in case of a chemical leak.

ammonia) they have at the facility," Oliveri told council.

"One thing I'd like to en-

sure council of is that the ammonia that is being used at Saputo has been used since 1983 and it's been

proven to be a very safe process," he said, adding numerous safeguards are already in place at the plants

and the concentration threshold that would see the siren activated is very low.

"When we're activating the siren it's at 30 parts per million, nobody will be able to smell it yet. So we're activating really quickly. This is truly a precautionary measure that has been asked for as part of the Environmental Protection Act and we feel that it's very unlikely that we'll have to use it," added Oliveri.

Despite the unlikelihood of such an emergency, the HHFD wants to make sure residents know what to do should the unlikely occur.

As part of its responsibilities under the act, Saputo has mailed and distributed pamphlets to all residents in the affected area explaining both the alarm and procedures residents should take in the event they hear the siren. The pamphlets were mailed on Sept. 18.

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Leakage may have started off with minimal and tolerable amounts of leakage that occurred with a cough or sneeze, but then leakage can accelerate to amounts that are substantial enough to wear protective padding, continence garments or simply just avoiding activities that were once enjoyed.

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