

Charlie brings clouds of death to Halton

Region comes through disaster test with flying colours

By STEPHEN BAKER

There were seven injured and one dead in Burlington last Thursday after a horrific crash between a school bus and a chemical tanker loaded with toluene diisocyanate. Also involved in the crash was a van carrying barrels of anhydrous ammonia. The injuries and the fatality were the result of the impact between the vehicles but the big fear was that the two fairly innocuous chemicals would come in contact and react to create clouds of hydrocyanic acid... that's Zyklon B to those old enough to remember the horrors of Auschwitz.

This was a scenario reminiscent of the Mississauga train derailment of 1979 where tanker cars of chlorine were spilled near tanker cars of styrene, a combination that would have produced Mace. 250,000 people had to be evacuated from Mississauga until the danger was past.

Fortunately the incident in

Burlington was just an exercise to test Halton's disaster preparedness. The exercise codenamed Charlie took nine months to plan and involved Halton Region, the City of Burlington, the Towns of Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills, the Halton Regional Police Service, the Halton School Boards, local hospitals, ambulance, emergency and community awareness groups, the Red Cross and the Burlington Chemical Association.

The simulated disaster was the creation of Wayne Gould, the Halton Region Emergency Management Coordinator. Wayne was the only person involved in the exercise who knew in advance what was going to happen. Everyone else had to react as the script played out. While the testing of front line troops is important, the real test of a disaster exercise is the effectiveness of the chain command.

The post mortem of the SARS outbreak in Canada revealed a tragedy of errors compounded by no clear command structure. With SARS, local authorities were unwilling or unable to cede decision making to the Province.

With this in mind, Exercise Charlie was used to probe the quality of leadership in Burlington, Oakville and the Region of Halton. Rob McIsaac, the Mayor of Burlington was quick to realize the implications of the unfolding situation and advised Halton Chair, Joyce Savoline to get the status upgraded to a

regional disaster, as well as apprising Oakville of the possible danger to its citizens. The disaster command centers in Burlington and Oakville worked seamlessly under the direction of the regional command center headed by Brent Marshall, the CAO of Halton Region. What would in reality have unfolded over twenty-four hours was compressed into a frantic three hours. Curve balls were continually being lobbed at the participants as the exercise probed for any weaknesses. By noon the exercise was declared an unqualified success.



Hazardous Materials workers check tanker truck for potential spillage of toluene diisocyanate.

Gary Carr seeks volunteers for committees

By DONNA DANIELLI

Gary Carr, Halton's Member of Parliament, wants to know what you think. He is asking the residents of his riding with interests in citizenship and immigration, senior's issues, or health care to volunteer their expertise by participating in an advisory committee.

"What I want to do is get some feedback from the community," explains Carr. "We'll sit around, have a coffee and listen to the recommendations from the people of my riding. It will allow for public input which I think is very important."

Carr sees each committee comprised of approximately eighteen people. Meetings will be held quarterly, on a Saturday, at his constituency office at 14 Martin Street in Milton. As well, Carr plans to forward information to committee members between meetings by e-mail, allowing for instant feedback and direction on issues from his constituents.

"We have a lot of people with a lot of expertise in the riding," says MP Gary Carr. "My feeling is that we should be using that expertise."

Anyone interested in joining one of the three committees is encouraged to call the constituency office at 905-693-0166.

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