

Region ready in case of emergency: CAO

By **HOWARD MOZEL**
Special to *The Champion*

In the wake of fears surrounding terrorist attacks and the release of anthrax in the U.S., one of Halton's top officials say he's fine-tuning the Region's emergency preparedness.

"We have an excellent emergency plan in place and has been in place for years," assured Halton CAO Brent Marshall. "We have done lots of work in the past 12 months perfecting the plan."

And ever since the September 11 attacks, Halton's emergency planning committee has stepped up its activities.

"Obviously that changed the way we think in general," added Mr. Marshall, stressing that the public should take comfort in the knowledge that everything which can be done in advance has been done. "All the intelligence we could ever require is here in Halton. All the professionals are at the table thinking."

Serious emergency planning at the local level traces its origins back to the Mississauga Train Derailment of November 1979. It really got rolling around 1992 and since then, the plan has been tested in mock disasters and is constantly refined.

The committee itself has met three times since the 9/11 atrocities, said Mr. Marshall, while individual members — such as he and Halton Regional Police Chief Ean Algar — speak on a daily basis.

"We have a really sound footing in place," said Mr. Marshall. "The structure is there."

Mr. Marshall was quick to point out that

Plastic bags disallowed in fall, 2002

By **LISA TALLYN**
Special to *The Champion*

Starting next fall, Halton residents won't be allowed to put their leaf and yard waste out for collection in plastic bags.

At Halton's planning and public works committee meeting Wednesday, members supported a recommendation that as of September 1, 2002, leaf and yard waste will only be collected in reusable containers and biodegradable paper yard waste bags.

The committee also supported the renewal of the contract with Gro-Bark for compost operations at the waste management site for five years.

The recommendations will go before regional council for final approval tomorrow.

"Banning the use of plastic bags for yard waste collection has environmental and economical benefits to the overall (composting) program," said Patrick Murphy, Halton's commissioner of planning and public works, in a report to the committee.

Eliminating plastic bags will shave nearly \$85,000 off the Region's annual composting cost, bringing the total to \$391,000, and another \$9,000 each year from staff time. It will also result in reduced odours and improved compost quality.

The cost of paper yard waste bags is about 2 to 25 cents more than a plastic yard waste bag.

While the ban on plastic bags is to begin September 1, the voluntary phase-in period will start April 2002.

so far there's no evidence of any real threat of anthrax anywhere in the country.

"There have been a number of responses, but so far Canada has not been a target," said Mr. Marshall. "But we have to take this seriously and are not taking any situation lightly."

Canadians aren't invulnerable, Mr. Marshall continued, but he encouraged residents to go about their daily routines while remaining vigilant for such anomalies as unknown powder in the mail. The bottom line, however, is that common sense must prevail.

"We're confident we're in good shape in Halton," said Mr. Marshall. "We're taking things seriously, but not over-reacting."

As for security around water purification plants and other essential local facilities, Mr. Marshall explained that a few months ago a consultant was contracted to review such considerations. The report is now being examined by senior staff. If need be, guards will be hired and Mr. Marshall said security firms will respond on short notice based on the intelligence received.

"We're well ahead of the game," he said. "There is a heightened awareness."

Mr. Marshall also said that Halton isn't a "fragmented community," meaning that regional government now acts as the umbrella organization for police, health, water and emergency planning.

"It's all under one roof," said Mr. Marshall, adding that the Region also has good working relationships with Halton's two school boards and fire departments. "The network is really tight."

He also said his staff has received the full support of elected officials.

"We are never let down by them," he said.

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