

Make sure that fire hydrants aren't buried in snow

By STEPHANIE THIESSEN

The Champion

Time is precious when fighting a fire. Every moment counts. So although covering a hydrant with snow may not seem like a big deal, it is.

That's the message coming from the Milton Fire Department, which wants to remind Miltonians that although spring is on its

way, now is still as important a time as ever to make sure all fire hydrants are visible.

Don Stewart, chief fire prevention officer, said he was driving around Milton recently and noticed that many fire hydrants near residents' houses were almost completely covered with snow. The same was true for many in industrial areas.

With so much snow this winter, there's no doubt about it — "It's tough for the hydrants," Mr. Stewart said.

"Anyone who has a hydrant, go and dig it out," he advised. "It makes our job easier. The faster we find it, the faster we get the job done."

He added that clearing hydrants could be a matter of life or death. If fire crews arrive to battle a fire and can't find the hydrant to hook trucks up to, they must either find another hydrant or waste precious moments digging it out, Mr. Stewart said.

Barry Kory, training technician with the Milton Fire Department, agreed.

"It could cause delays in getting the fire attacked. Minutes are precious. If time is wasted when hydrants are covered with snow, the building's in jeopardy."

Mr. Stewart said most people who don't clear their hydrants assume their houses would never catch fire — a dangerous assumption.


It's usually contractors who are to blame for covering fire hydrants in industrial areas, Mr. Stewart said. Sometimes it's dark and the hydrants aren't visible, or they're blocked by mountains of snow.

"They might not realize that there's a hydrant on the other side (of the snow mountain). It doesn't take long before snow starts falling off the other side and covering the hydrant."

Mr. Stewart said residents should also be aware of the importance of making sure exhaust pipes for furnaces and hot water tanks aren't blocked by snow.

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Public urged to stay outside vehicles while pumping gas during the winter

The cold, Canadian winter causes many of us to spend as little time outside as possible. Even at gas stations, some people sit in their vehicles while the gas is pumping.

But did you know this is dangerous and could cause a fire?

The Petroleum Equipment Institute is urging the public to stay outside their vehi-

cles while pumping gas, and Tim Roberts, Milton Fire Department co-ordinator, is echoing the advice.

The problem? Static electricity. Vapours from the gas can be ignited by static charges gained while re-entering the vehicle. "You minimize the chance of static building up at the nozzle if you stay outside," Mr. Roberts said.

Bob Renkes of Petroleum Equipment Institute has been involved in researching 150 vehicle fires caused as a result of people re-entering the vehicles while gas was pumping.

Most of the cases involved women wearing rubber-soled shoes. In almost all cases, the women got into their vehicles while the

nozzles were still pumping gas. When they got out and went to pull the nozzle out, the fires started as a result of static — the vapours were ignited from the static charges. Mr. Renkes said if it's absolutely necessary to re-enter the vehicle, make sure when you get out of the car, you close the door touching the metal before you ever pull the nozzle out. This is how the static from your body is discharged before you remove the nozzle.

Mr. Roberts said: "The bottom line is, how long does it take (to pump gas)? If you understand what could potentially happen by getting back in for the sake of a couple of minutes, you realize it's worthwhile to stay outside."

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