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Financial impact of blackout minimal for Milton

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

Town of Milton and Halton Region officials don't expect the blackout that hit Ontario to hit the wallets of taxpayers.

Milton's acting CAO Mel Iovio said the Town hasn't been affected financially all that much by the power problem. Town Hall was closed last Friday and recreational and leisure programs were cancelled because of limited power due to the black-

out.

But on Monday Town Hall re-opened and the recreation/leisure programs re-started.

"I don't think there'll be any major impacts, but it hasn't been assessed," he said. "There were some costs involved but there is also some savings, like power savings."

The Town is currently conserving energy wherever it can, like by turning off municipal office computers at night as Ontario moves to restore regular daily power.

The Region is still tallying its costs resulting from the August 14 blackout. It has had to pay for things like staff overtime, extra gasoline for police and ambulance vehicles to operate during the height of the blackout, as well as renting additional generators to provide back-up power where needed.

Halton's acting CAO Adelina Urbanski said there's room within its 2003 operating budget to absorb the extra costs. It also has reserves to help financially, if needed.

Ms Urbanski said the Region is hoping the Province might reimburse at least some of the costs due to the power problem, Ms Urbanski said. That will help save regional dollars, she said, that can be used for other things.

It's not clear if, or how much, the Province might give to municipalities to minimize the costs of dealing with the unprecedented power shortage.

But Ms Urbanski said provincial officials have told the Region to document the costs incurred by the power problem —

much the same way hospitals recorded increased costs due to SARS — and to submit them to the government.

"We would like to see some assistance from the Province," she said.

Two regional Tory MPPs, however, were kind of cool on the idea of compensation.

Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh said, "We're trying to get the grid back up and running and there will lots of time to look at stuff afterward. I'd be in favour of looking at it (compensation), but I'm not sure what case can be made for it."

Burlington MPP Cam Jackson said no one has called his office about compensation and that his government's "first priority" is getting the power supply stable again.

They both congratulated everyone for trying to conserve energy during these tough times.

And Milton Hydro Distribution Inc.'s president and CEO Don Thome is urging residents and businesses to continue conserving energy. With the potential of soaring temperatures, it could impact Ontario's still-unstable power supply.

"We're definitely looking for everybody to do their part," he said. "What we've been told is probably by the end of the weekend the system will be in a normal state of reliability, but that is depending on a whole bunch of things happening, like generators coming on (line)."

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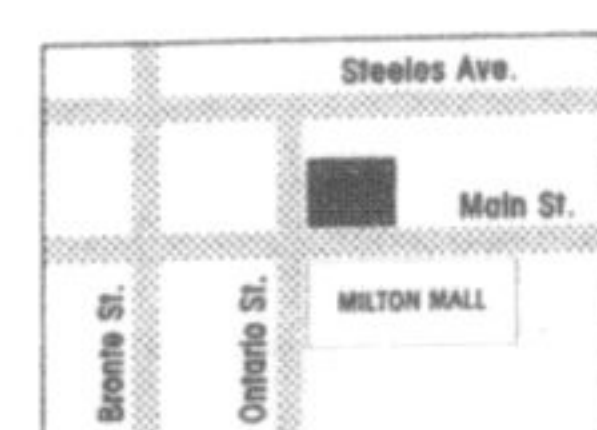


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