

NEC tells Chudleigh's, Granite Ridge to remove cars

Also warns Toronto Auto Auction that legal action could be taken

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The Champion

The Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) is investigating more public reports that vehicles from the Toronto Auto Auction are being stored on escarpment lands where they're prohibited.

It's also warning the Toronto Auto Auction that legal action could be taken.

The vehicles were recently launched into the spotlight after the commission turned down Country Heritage Park's application that would've allowed thousands of cars awaiting sale at the auction to be stored on its rural property during the off-season — an initiative that helped fund the local tourist destination.

Some of the reasons behind the denial include 'commercial' car parking not being viewed as compatible with the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the fact it's not a permitted use in the 'escarpment protection' area.

Now the auction has been left to find alternate sites to store its vehicles. One of the locations *The Champion* confirmed is Chudleigh's apple farm on Regional Road 25, which is part of the Niagara Escarpment lands. The other is Granite Ridge Golf Club on Dublin Line, also Niagara Escarpment lands.

In a registered letter from the NEC to the Toronto Auto Auction dated December 1, the company was informed of its contraventions of the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act by storing vehicles at Chudleigh's and Granite Ridge. The letter states the storage of vehicles in escarpment lands should be halted since it's being done without an NEC-issued permit.

Prosecution and fines may result, it says. If unpermitted parking activities continue, the letter says, the NEC may issue an 'Order to Stop', with resulting penalties.

"Legal action may be commenced without further notice," the letter reads.

The Toronto Auto Auction was also informed that permits from other sources — not just the NEC — might be required in order for the storage of cars to be permitted, including the Town of Halton Hills — Granite Ridge falls on the border of Milton and Halton Hills — and the Region of Halton.

Mr. Chudleigh said the farm had made an agreement with Toronto Auto Auction to have 1,000 cars parked on its property during the coming months.

When he made the decision, he said he hadn't spoken with the

NEC and didn't anticipate it being a problem.

But Chudleigh's was contacted by the NEC December 1 and told it was in contravention of the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act.

Up until then, Mr. Chudleigh said he hadn't heard a permit was necessary to allow the vehicles on his property.

"You build a (parking) lot, you think it's to park cars there," Mr. Chudleigh said, noting the irony.

As of press time yesterday, the cars were still in the parking lot, but Mr. Chudleigh said they'd be moved starting tomorrow.

"It's not easy to move that many cars instantly," he said.

According to NEC Director Mark Frawley, a permit is necessary for the vehicles to be parked on escarpment lands.

"The chances of getting such a permit, in my view, would be pretty small," he said, but noted anyone can certainly apply.

Toronto Auto Auction general manager Brad Hart confirmed he has been contacted by the commission on the matter.

"And we will do whatever we have to do," he noted.

He said the auction has been "looking all over the place" for appropriate sites to store its vehicles and wasn't specifically looking at escarpment properties.

He also said the auction didn't look into whether Chudleigh's property was inside or outside the Niagara Escarpment.

Richard Murzin, manager of communications for the NEC, said Granite Ridge Golf Club was also contacted December 1 and informed of its contravention of the act as it doesn't have a permit.

He said Granite Ridge hadn't yet responded, and that follow-up calls would be made.

None of the managers at Granite Ridge wished to comment on the matter.

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Correction

A name in Tuesday's Champion was incorrect. Information accompanying photos of a Christmas event, the On the Way to Bethlehem Nativity Pageant, at Country Heritage Park stated that Keith Stewart portrayed King Herod when in fact playing the role was Rob Croezen. The Champion regrets this error and any inconvenience it may have caused.



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