

Great Tire Fire battle not won yet

OHSWEKEN — The invasion began with men in large vehicles and helmets. Then lots of uniformed men and cars with flashing red lights. Next came the cannons, followed by the bombers and helicopters. The environmental war has been brought to the doorstep of the Six Nations people by the Great Hagersville Tire Fire. It was only one battle in a huge world-wide war which some people believe is already lost.

When the last water cannon was put away and the tire fire was put out, this battle was certainly not won. It was lost several years ago when the tire pile got too big to be safe. It was lost when the corporations who make and sell tires refused to plan how to recycle or re-use their products. It was lost when federal and local governments let these producers of tires wash their hands of the whole business of even thinking about the final disposal of their products. And, let's face it, tires are very difficult to get rid of.

The fire is out but the oil and other poisonous substances from the burning tires will remain in the porous rock beneath for

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years and years to come. This is shale with layers and cracks which extends for miles. Polluted water is able to travel for miles in a matter of days or weeks in this type of rock. It will not stay just under the site of the fire as it might have, if there were a couple of hundred feet of clay above the rock.

Around Hagersville, Springvale and Townsend there are places where the underlying rocks are covered by only a few feet of soil. In some places the soil can be measured in inches.

I almost had to evacuate but I was one of the lucky ones. The thick black cloud streaming across the reserve like a dirty ribbon was a scary thing to see, close up. So was the huge black pillar of smoke on the first day of the fire. When I saw it from six miles away, first thing Monday morning, its size reminded me of an atomic bomb. I was glad the wind was not blowing toward me.

The wind did blow our way for a time one night. We could not see the black ribbon but we saw the black globules of rubber on the snow the next morning. I hope my lawn in front and my garden out back will be okay next summer.

They say it's an ill wind that does not blow some good. One good thing about this fire is that it happened now. If it happened five years from now maybe the tire pile would have been twice as big.