



Whitchurch-Stouffville firefighters train a hose (left) on this 9th Line shed while battling a blaze Saturday morning. According to fire officials, two children, aged 9 and 10, lit candles and newspapers to spark the blaze. The fire, which caused an estimated \$115,000 in damage, kept firefighters busy for much of the day. Environment ministry and health officials were subsequently called in to investigate the effects of leftover gardening chemicals that were housed on the site. Below, an Ontario Provincial Police officer receives first aid from ambulance officials while on the scene of the blaze. No charges are being laid in connection with the incident.

photos by
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Arson behind shed blaze

A fire on the weekend causing more than \$100,000 damage to a vacant storage warehouse was the work of arson, according to York Regional Police Sergeant Norm Miles.

And Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire Chief Bill Brown said he called in several different agencies, including the environment ministry, because some leftover hazardous chemicals were stored on the three-acre site.

The fire started at about 10:45 a.m. Saturday on 9th Line, just south of Stouffville Road.

Police said Monday the fire was started after two young children, who cannot be named under terms of the Young Offenders Act, lit candles and burned newspaper inside an old greenhouse shed.

The children went to the upper level of the warehouse and lit some candles, then proceeded downstairs where they lit some newspaper on

fire, said Sgt. Miles. The newsprint ignited cardboard, which started the blaze.

The children are not considered young offenders under the Act, which deals with youths 12 and over, and the police cannot charge the two with arson or even mischief, Sgt. Miles added.

"Nothing at all happens to them. If anything, the parents can be personally sued through a civil suit, but the kids cannot be charged," Sgt. Miles said.

Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire Chief Bill Brown said the fire damage, which has caused some local environmental concern, is estimated at \$115,000.

"I have been plagued with calls all weekend by neighbors who are getting all upset without having all the facts," the chief said.

Although he admits there were some hazardous materials on the site

when the blaze occurred, proper authorities have been called and the area is being closely monitored, Chief Brown said.

"There is nothing confirmed yet that the materials are humanly hazardous and the chemicals are to be cleaned up. The whole area is covered," he added.

Chief Brown said he called the health department and the environment ministry to the scene as "standard procedure" when "any amount of anything hazardous" is suspected.

"We wanted to be safe and do everything by the book," he said.

The old shed was used as a greenhouse at one time and because he knows greenhouses use strong chemicals, he called in all necessary investigators.

However, he said people shouldn't panic because everything is being cleaned up.

In fact, some of the materials

found are the same chemicals people use to nourish their own lawns.

"They might be stronger and more concentrated, but many people probably use the same ones in their own back yard," Chief Brown said.

He said concerns about a large pile of "white stuff," is a material used in potting soil that "every house plant in town" contains.

Chief Brown also called the Fire Marshall's office, and two police forces, which confirmed the fire was intentionally started.

The hazardous waste investigation is still underway.



Holiday horrors

Stouffville travel firms work hard after Soundair collapse

TRACY KIBBLE
Staff Reporter

More than 90 Stouffville and area residents may face travel delays or cancellations following the collapse last week of Soundair Corp., which owes \$52.6 million to the Royal Bank of Canada.

And two local travel agencies are frantically working "two-and-a-half times harder" to rearrange flights and locations for the customers they have booked, says Stouffville Travel owner Don Jackson.

The financial downfall began last Thursday when Soundair and sister company Thomson Vacations were forced into receivership by the bank.

Odyssey International, a charter airline and subsidiary of the company went down with the fall-leaving many Canadian travellers on hold or stranded in other countries.

Mr. Jackson says he has anywhere from 50 to 100 customers booked through Thomson or one of the other companies affected by the demise and is "taking a financial bath" along with the large travel companies he books with.

"My biggest concern is for customers departing in seven days. One lady (booked with Regent Holidays) is leaving for the U.K. in a week and I hope Regent arranges someone else to carry these people," Mr. Jackson says.

The whole British and European (travel) program works around Odyssey and will be drastically affected by the debt of the companies involved, Mr. Jackson says.

Meanwhile, he and other agencies "have to do the work all over again - more than double the work and we don't get paid," he says.

"I don't get reimbursed and I have to forfeit the

commission and still have to rearrange for my customers," Mr. Jackson adds.

"My view is (Soundair Corp.) had a debt load but couldn't earn the income to pay it - and down they went," he speculates.

Meanwhile, Stonehouse Travel owner Bernadette Marshman says her agency has 40 Stouffville residents booked through Regent Holidays and at least another 40 through Thomson Vacations.

"Anybody using Odyssey International is affected by this," Ms. Marshman says.

The patrons will be reimbursed through the compensation fund, and the whole process could take five months.

Customers who want to continue with plans will have to pay again and wait until October for a reimbursement from the first booking, Mrs. Marshman says.

"We're trying to find alternative space on other airlines for around the same time as the original booking," she adds.

"We've been really lucky" because only one customer was held up outside the country - in Florida, but was delayed only 12 hours, Mrs. Marshman says.

Regent Holidays "is working really hard and trying its best to reschedule people as soon as possible," she adds.

Thomson Vacations owes money to numerous resorts and clubs in popular holiday spots, reports show.

And travellers were feeling the brunt of the downfall when hotels refused to accommodate the travellers who were often left to pay bills that were supposed to be covered by the company.

Disabled parking permits replace old licence plates

Whitchurch-Stouffville residents who have difficulty walking unassisted for more than 218 yards, and are certified as disabled by a physician, chiropractor or physiotherapist are eligible for a special parking permit.

The Ministry of Transportation is presenting a new convenient portable permit to replace the old disabled symbol licence plates, the ministry announced last week.

The new permits can be valid for up to five years on renewal for people with temporary or permanent disabilities, starting May 1.

The permits are free and can be transferred to any vehicle a handicapped person is driving in, regardless if the person drives or not.

The new permit is a result of concerns from disabled representatives of various organizations across the province, which had asked for a new approach to parking permits.

An application for qualified people can be obtained by writing: Ministry of Transportation, Licensing Assistance Section, 2680 Keele Street, Downsview, Ontario M3M 1E6, or call (416) 235-2999.

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