

Exclusive

# Consumers doesn't follow Watts specs

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water started coming from the taps. A plumber checked the hot water tank and determined that it needed to be flushed, a practice that should be done every 60 days.

"This (flushing) is something most people don't even know about," said Smith.

More important, the plumber noticed that the pressure relief valve was so corroded that it wouldn't budge.

"The valve couldn't do its job. It was stuck. The water's so hard in Stouffville, it caused a build-up of crud and affected the valve," said Smith. Corrosion occurred even though the Smiths own a water softener.

Smith is worried. If the valve can't open to relieve pressure, the tank might blow up, she's suggesting. "I've been told it could go off like a bomb," said Smith. "I'm worried about the neighbors."

Sevick said the tank can't blow. "We have 1.2 million customers. We've never had a tank explode," he said.

The Tribune contacted eight plumbers. Some said a hot water tank can't explode; some said an explosion could occur if the conditions were right; one plumber said a tank could blow up but it would be a "one in a million" event. A senior plumber, meanwhile, said life has taught him that things that "never can happen seem to have a way of happening at one time or another." Common sense dictates that in the interest of safety, regular tank inspections are in order, he advised.

Ted Clark, certification manager for International Approvals Services, a gas appliance testing laboratory, said from a technical standpoint, hot water tanks do have the potential to explode. The relief valve works as a safety backup. "The

valve is on there as a safety function. That's its function," said Clark.

Clark said while he's never seen a domestic tank explode, many years ago, he did see the aftermath of a commercial tank explosion.

Karla Compiton, spokesperson for the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, said to her knowledge the government has never heard of an incident where one blew up.

In material, published by relief valve manufacturer Watts Industries Canada Inc., taking care of the valve is viewed as critical.

Watts recommends valve inspections once every three years. Consumers Gas tank inspections are done once every 10 years," said Sevick.

Failure to reinspect as directed by Watts could result in unsafe temperature or pressure build-up which can result in



Judy Smith shows the tag which indicates regular service is mandatory on water heaters.

Photo: SJOERD WITTEVEEN

serious injury or death and/or severe property damage," Watts states.

The gas company follows the guidelines of Consumers Gas and not that of the valve manufacturer, said Sevick.

Smith thinks Consumers Gas should follow Watts' recommendations.

In areas such as Stouffville where water is especially hard, tank inspections should be carried out more than once a decade, said Smith.

Clark said Smith's opinion is valid. "In areas like Stouffville, extra care could be taken," said Clark. "More than once every three would likely be advisable."

Stouffville does, indeed, have a hard water problem, said Paul Whitehouse, Whitchurch-Stouffville public works director.

Smith wants a message, outlining the proper care of a tank, to be included in the gas or the water bill. The request is reasonable, said Whitehouse. The municipality could work in partnership with Consumers Gas to educate people about the tanks, he said.

"Education is needed. People do need information about the flushing," said Whitehouse. Safety is an issue, he added.

Smith called Consumers Gas and reported the problem. A service man came and replaced the pressure relief valve. The next day, Smith said she found "a ripped yellow tag" in a garbage box.

The warning tag, attached to the valve by Watts, includes important information, said Smith. When the service man installed the new valve, he tore the tag off and threw it away, Smith speculated.

The tag was taken off "by mis-

take," said Sevick. Consumers Gas makes "a practice of leaving the tags on," Sevick stressed.

Doug Dyer, national sales manager for Watts, said the tag is put on for "a purpose" and shouldn't be removed.

The tag states that the valve lever must be operated at least once a year by the water heater owner to ensure that the waterways are clear. Also, it states that the valves should be inspected once every three years.

Again, Sevick said that Consumers Gas doesn't necessarily follow the manufacturers' guidelines. Consumers Gas service people will do a visual check of the hot water tank when they are responding to

calls on other Consumers Gas rental appliances, said Sevick. "They do this free-of-charge," he said. And, if a homeowner asks to have a tank checked, "it'll be done," added Sevick.

Sevick said he didn't know that the yellow tag recommends inspections every three years. "I didn't know," he said.

Smith said she's paid \$8 a month for her hot water tank. Over the past 11 years, she's paid about \$1,115 for the rental tank.

The wholesale price of a hot water tank today is about \$385, while a tank service charge would cost Consumers about \$70, Smith estimated.

"There's big profit here," said Smith. "They've got over a million customers. The company can afford to consider changing how it does inspections."

Sevick said he plans to contact Smith and review the situation. "Yes, we'll be looking at our policies," said Sevick.

## Health

# Ban may hurt business: Mayor

(From page 1)

vey is suggesting that local residents are concerned about the hazards of second-hand smoke and support the idea of making many of our public places smoke-free.

Of those questioned, 76 per cent support smoke-free workplaces, 78 per cent want smoke-free recreational facilities, while about 64 per cent back no-smoking rules in restaurants and donut shops.

"We're also encouraged to see that many people will go more often to these public places if they are smoke free," said Yaffe. "This should be very encouraging to restaurant owners and employees," she added.

Second hand smoke is, indeed, an issue in York Region.

Yaffe is reminding local residents that when people breathe smoke from a burning cigarette, they are breathing in "more than 4,000 chemicals," including poisons like "arsenic, benzene and lead."

Yaffe added, "At least 30 of these chemicals are known to cause cancer. Also, second-hand smoke has twice as much nicotine and tar as the smoke that smokers inhale."

The move towards a smoke-free region is being driven by the municipality of Vaughan.

Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson is worried about how a blanket approach would affect business. Extending the community's no-smoking arena even further could pose an additional burden on business, said Emmerson.

"I know smoking hurts health, but business gets hurt too," said Emmerson.

As it is, such places as restaurants and bingo halls have areas designated for smokers and non smokers. Emmerson said he wonders if the existing law is about as fair as it can get.

When the local municipality reviews the rules linked to smoking, the public will have an opportunity for input, said Emmerson.

While Whitchurch-Stouffville and other GTA municipalities are contemplating the smoking laws, the City of Vancouver has passed a 100 per cent smoke-free bylaw.

# Smoke-free businesses say they're healthy

By CHARLENE McCUE  
Correspondent

Two local businesses didn't go up in smoke after they changed to smoke free environments.

Rod King, owner of Uxbridge and Stouffville Tim Horton's, said making the change hasn't hurt business. The decision was made after pressure from Tim Horton's head office and the Township of Uxbridge.

Stouffville's Tim Horton's made the change last June and Uxbridge just this past week.

"We have heard more positive comments than negative," said King. "It is becoming a trend to turn smoke-free."

Some smoking customers complained that making the change was discrimination against them. But the regulars are still coming in, he said.

"It creates a nicer environment for non-smokers," said Dave Jones, manager of Stouffville's Tim Horton's. "It hasn't affected sales, if at all we have gotten busier."

So The Tribune asked local restaurant, bar and donut shop owners how having a 100 per cent smoke free environment would impact their businesses.

"It would have a huge impact and we just would

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