

Courthouse mould could reappear, professor warns

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

Toxic mould will reappear at the Newmarket courthouse unless the source of the contamination is destroyed, according to a biochemist who helped write the book on dealing with the noxious contaminants.

Dr. David Miller is a professor at Carleton University in Ottawa.

The fungi expert also works part-time for Health Canada and helped develop protocols on dealing with mould for the City of New York.

Those guidelines are used across North America by public sector organizations that discover mould in their buildings.

'They've tried to do clean-up in a piecemeal basis'

Mould, which can cause illnesses ranging from a runny nose and eyes to dizziness and fatigue to respiratory problems, is most often caused by water leakage in buildings.

While Miller can't speak specifically about the Newmarket courthouse, he said if a building isn't completely cleared of mould and the source of the leakage isn't plugged, it will grow back.

That has the senior health and safety officer for the union representing the majority of unionized courthouse employees worried.

OPSEU's Bob DeMatteo argues there have been structural problems with the Eagle Street courthouse since it was built in the early 1980s.

The building handles all of York Region's court cases.

"The building was structurally defective from the beginning and the protective seal was not

installed properly," said DeMatteo, adding the bricks had to be removed in the 1980s to deal with the problem.

He's not convinced the source of the leakage is being addressed, which leads him to believe the mould will reappear in a few months.

"I find it suspect what they're doing there. I don't think they've dealt with the source of the problem," he said.

"If you haven't dealt with the water problem, there will continue to be contamination."

DeMatteo is concerned about the health of the employees in the building, many of whom have already reported illnesses.

"Bear in mind at the courthouse, the levels of contamination are quite high," he said.

"They've tried to do clean-up in a piecemeal basis. They're shutting one area off and cleaning it up and going to another area."

DeMatteo said court operations should be transferred to another location until the mould is cleaned up.

Last week, the ministry ordered four courtrooms and five judges' chambers closed under the Occupational Health and Safety Act because of the mould.

But Miller said it's very rare to close a building down during removal of mould. However, he added the decision should be based on the severity of each case.

Mould has been removed from three of the four courtrooms since the Ministry of Labour ordered them closed, according to Brendan Crawley, a spokesperson for the Ministry of the Attorney General, which operates the courthouse.

While the mould has also been removed from the five judges' chambers, two on the fourth floor won't be re-opened until a structural engineer investigates the source of the mould.

Planners oppose development on sensitive moraine land

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

A provincial planners' organization has added its voice to criticism the province has not done enough to keep development off the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The 2,400-member Ontario Professional Planners Institute has called on the government to draft policy that would protect most of the environmentally sensitive area.

"What we are saying is that stronger leadership is required by the province," the institute's Ann Joyner said.

"We are proposing a more holistic approach, one that provides a comprehensive planning strategy from the beginning of the moraine to the end."

The provincial government must outline specific areas that should be off limits to development, Joyner added.

Key provincial ministers have released a statement that says several measures, including guidelines adopted under former premier Bob Rae, offer enough protection.

"These guidelines, which have been incorporated into the official plans of each region containing the moraine, were designed to ensure significant features and functions of the moraine are protected," according to the statement, which was released by Environment Minister Dan Newman, Municipal Affairs Minister Tony Clement and Natural Resources Minister John Snobelen.

The province has also released to the Ontario Municipal Board a map and statement, which recommends development be prevented on a section of the moraine in Richmond Hill.

Applications to erect thousands of houses on the 2,000-square-kilometre moraine are before an OMB hearing.

Observers say the process is weighted in favour of developers because board members will look at an application without asking how it may hurt the entire moraine.

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Joyner echoed environmentalists' comments by saying the OMB must examine the cumulative effects of an application, not only the effects it would have on the section of the moraine where it's proposed.

But Richmond Hill planning commissioner Janet Babcock said the board will look at the applications in the context of the entire moraine.

OMB members, she noted, are planning to take an airplane ride next week that would let them view the entire moraine and the connections it has with surrounding areas.

After sitting Monday, the hearing took a break Tuesday and Wednesday. Officials expect it will resume June 20.

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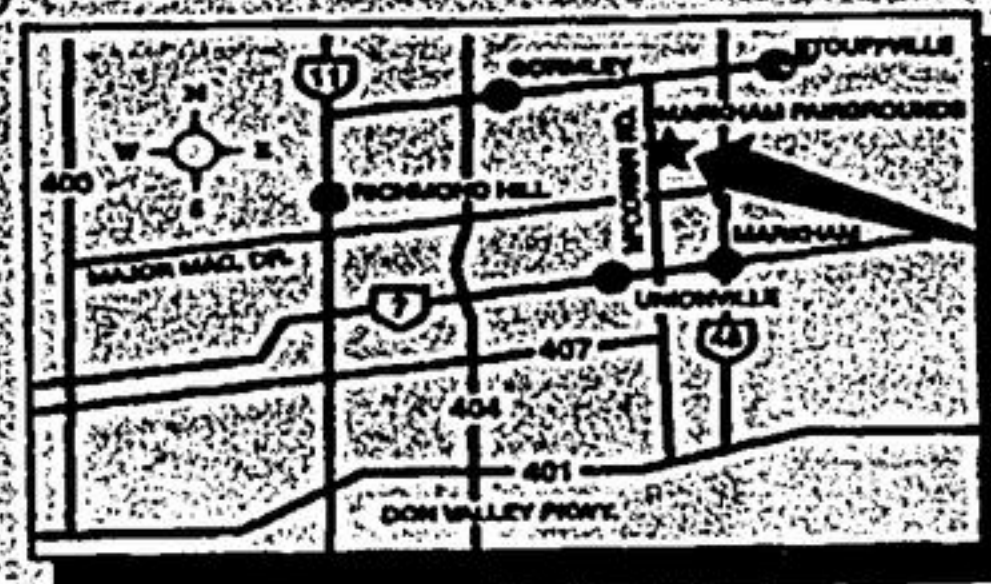
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