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York Region's emergency personnel try to maintain business-as-usual approach

BY ROGER VARLEY
Staff Writer

Despite a recent poll showing increased anxiety among Canadians following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., its almost business as usual for York Region's front-line emergency personnel.

"Everyone's more concerned, but none of our people are panicking," said David Kingston, president of the York Regional Police Association.

He said he is not aware of any members of the force approaching the job any differently than they did before the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

Bob Snowball, Markham's deputy fire chief, was of the same opinion.

"There's a definite awareness (of possible terrorist-related emergencies)," said Snowball.

"We're not taking it lightly, but firefighters are going about their business the same as before."

Gord McEachen, acting director of operations for York Region Emergency Measures Services, said recent anthrax scares in the area were treated "as part of the regular job".

"We made sure all our staff got all the information necessary," said McEachen. "We really don't want to spread panic about anthrax."

"Our paramedics are extremely dedicated," he added. "Sixty-five percent of them were ready to go down to New York if they were needed."

Front-line personnel aren't completely immune from the after-effects, however.

Pastor Bill Thornton of Stouffville, who serves as a volunteer chaplain for York Regional Police 5 Division, said officers haven't voiced any concerns to him relating to terrorism. But he added that doesn't mean they don't have concerns.

"I'm not suggesting they're not reeling like the rest of us," said Thornton, "but do they call me? No. Do I expect them to? No. Is it because they're mostly men? Yes."

Doug Kunihiro, a York Region paramedic, said the period since Sept. 11 has been "a kind of emotional time" for EMS workers.

"Things changed for all of us," he said. "Policemen, firefighters and EMS workers dying at the scene was pretty close to home, disturbing, unsettling," he said.

"They were people doing the same job we do."

Although he wasn't involved in any of the numerous anthrax scares that touched York Region last week, Kunihiro said other paramedics found it somewhat unsettling the first time

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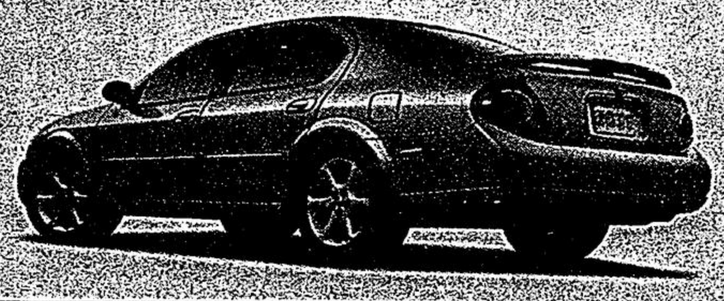

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