

## Stouffville Tribune

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### EDITORIAL

## Time for region to clean up its act

We're getting sick of this crap. Literally. For the second time in five years, York Region is facing charges in connection with a sewage spill.

This time it's two charges, one under the Ontario Water Resources Act and the other under the Environmental Protection Act, related to a spill of 1 million litres of sewage into the Black River in May 2001.

A malfunction at the Woodriver Bend pumping station near Jackson's Point went undetected for three days, during which time sewage continued to spill into the river, which feeds into Lake Simcoe.

Nearly a year-and-a-half later, regional works commissioner Kees Schipper says the region doesn't know exactly what happened.

It's still being investigated. How can this possibly be? One has to wonder how high a priority this investigation has been given.

Peter Sibbald Brown of the Georgina environmental group Lake Watch says residents have told him about other, smaller scale problems with the pumping station.

One might think the region would have learned from its experiences. Apparently not.

The region faced similar charges in connection with a 1997 spill of 2 million gallons of sewage into a tributary of the Don River near Bayview and Steeles avenues in Thornhill.

At the time, the region insisted the spill was the unpreventable result of an unlikely series of accidents involving a lightning strike, an electrical malfunction in the backup generator and a fire alarm. Regional officials expressed disbelief charges had been laid.

Then the region pleaded guilty to one of the charges and paid a \$35,000 fine.

It is facing a maximum \$20 million in fines from the Black River spill.

While the courts have never levied the maximum fine, or anything close to it, the region — and its taxpayers — certainly can't expect to get off so lightly the second time around.

But far more important than the cost of the fines is the potential damage to the environment, which isn't known right now because nobody has done an assessment of the long-term effects of the spill.

Obviously, that's the key question here. Most people in the area depend on well water.

The Black River itself is one of the last refuges of wild Ontario in the region, with 10 provincially recognized environmentally sensitive areas along its length.

Hardly the place we ought to be using as a toilet. The most effective defence York Region can mount against these charges is to demonstrate it is taking the problem seriously and to show exactly what is being done to ensure it doesn't happen again.

It's time for York Region to clean up its act.

# OPINION

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Debora Kelly

## No magic switch to solve hydro mess

W oohoo-o-o-o, I'm living large in Ontario 2002.

Last night, I had lights burning in empty rooms.

Lavishly racking up those kw-hs at a gazillion-million cents, just like the old days when I gave little thought to electricity.

Now, I actually hear myself telling the kids, "Turn off the basement light when you come upstairs — electricity is very expensive now, you know!"

The Tory government's move to deregulate electricity six months ago is creating shockwaves as rates skyrocket.

It's an understatement to say the scheme to provide a consistent, dependable source of affordable hydro isn't working. From what I read, the plan was flawed in its assumption the private sector would eagerly jump at the opportunity to get into the market.

It is becoming clear a solution is beyond the reach of the Tories.

It would be comforting to think, as Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees explained to us last month, a convergence of circumstances created the problem.

He pointed to the long, hot summer, which placed an unprecedented strain on our supply of power at a time when nuclear reactors in Pickering and at the Bruce power station were off line.

I just received the third of my own ever increasing hydro bills; the long, hot summer argument lost its shine some time ago, Mr. Klees.

The situation not only affects consumers, but businesses and public institutions, such as school boards and hospitals, already strapped for cash.

A few Tories are even getting desperate. Labour Minister Brad Clark wants his government to cap rates "while power generation is developed."

And Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound MPP Bill Murdoch foresees the future: "You know what happens to governments who don't fix things like this — they don't come around again."

Never mind the cuts to education, shortage of doctors and single moms tossed off welfare, he's right; this is the gaffe that will bring the Tories down.

The problem won't be miraculously solved while a charade of rebates, equal billing and capped rates plays out.

Shouldn't the Tories have seen this one coming? Some of the pitfalls of deregulation were well demonstrated in California and, closer to home, in Alberta. In California, private firms didn't come to the table either. When brownouts and blackouts became everyday fare, the solution was to establish a public agency to buy power out of state and build new plants.

Go figure, just like what we used to have here! In the meantime, I'll enjoy the glow of candlelight...

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Why so few trick-or-treaters on the streets this year?

Where have all the children gone?

We have lived in Unionville for 19 years. For the first 17, we could count on at least 120 kids at our door.

Last year, we had 70, this year 45. Although we don't have any children of our own, we put our pumpkins out each year and enjoy the parade of costumes at our door.

We realize neighbourhoods change, but there are three elementary schools within a kilometre of our house.

Virtually all the kids that came to our door this year were accompanied by an adult, which is a good thing.

My question is where is everybody else? Have we let our paranoia about security get the best of us?

Why not let kids be kids again?

LARRY ROWE  
UNIONVILLE

### Restraint, good manners a tribute to today's children

It was 7:30 p.m. on Halloween and only two trick-or-treaters had come to our front door.

I looked at the pile of gum, chocolate bars and chips that we had purchased and won-

dered what we would do with all of it. At that moment, a princess and a horse arrived. I decided to offer them as much candy as they wanted. Each child took one thing and proceeded to thank me.

I found this curious and wondered what I would have done in my Halloween days if I had been given such an open-ended offer.

And so the night wore on. More and more creatures arrived at the door and I invited them to have whatever they wanted.

What had begun as a way to hopefully empty the cache turned out to be quite an eye opener.

The children of Markham are truly children of character. Not one took more than one candy out of each bowl I had offered.

Every child that entered the vestibule of our home was polite, friendly and extremely appreciative.

This Halloween was a breath of fresh air.

ELAINE TORDAI  
MARKHAM

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