

# York board leery about liability with new allergy bill

BY MITCHELL BROWN  
Staff Writer

As a school principal, Dave Levac experienced several close calls involving students with allergies.

The former Brantford-area principal recalls a class trip several years ago when a student was stung by a bee.

"Fortunately, our emergency plan happened exactly as it should," he said.

However, he added, if he had been at a school board that didn't have a plan, the outcome could have been a lot worse.

While he acknowledges most boards in the province have some plan to protect students with allergies, Mr. Levac, who is also the Liberal MPP for Brant, is sponsoring a bill that would make every school board in the province adopt the same policy for dealing with students with allergies.

Bill 3 would require boards to develop strategies to reduce the risk of exposure, arrange for staff training and,

in the event of an emergency, school staff would be permitted to administer medication without parental consent.

It passed second reading last week and will now go to committee for discussion before a third and final reading, which Mr. Levac hopes will take place in time for schools to implement it before next September.

"If you cut a peanut 1,000 times, that 1/1000th of a peanut can kill a child," Mr. Levac said.

"That's how serious this can be."

Also known as anaphylaxis, it's estimated that between 1 and 2 per cent of the population, or 300,000 to 600,000 Canadians, suffer from severe allergies to peanuts, dairy products, eggs, insect stings, latex and other irritants.

Those with the most severe allergic reactions, who tend to be children, can be treated, but only if life-saving medication is administered as soon as possible.

To that end, most boards, including the public and Catholic boards in York Region, have policies outlining the rights and responsibilities of parents and teachers when an allergic child attends school.

Still, Mr. Levac believes this is serious enough to require a uniform policy across the province.

"The closest thing the Education Act says is that the principal should be responsible for the health of the students in the school," he said.

"When we're talking life and death, there should be a minimum standard across Ontario."

He acknowledged there may be some concern about boards adopting a policy in which parents are not informed before a child is medicated, but he said there have been cases where it was not known a child had an allergy until suffering a reaction.

"We would find it very disturbing that a parent would not try to have all the ammunition needed to keep their

child alive," he said, adding the province is carefully considering the legal aspects of the bill.

York public board spokesperson Ross Virgo could not comment on the wording of the bill, but his board will watch the legislation very carefully.

"I can tell you that this would be an area of serious concern, not only to members of our teachers' unions, but also to our administrators," he said.

"They certainly have the

interest of students in mind, but there are liability issues around the administration of medicine."

Laurie Harada, executive director of Anaphylaxis Canada, said it's "wonderful" someone is taking on the issue. "We take a lot of calls from school boards and parents with issues," she said.

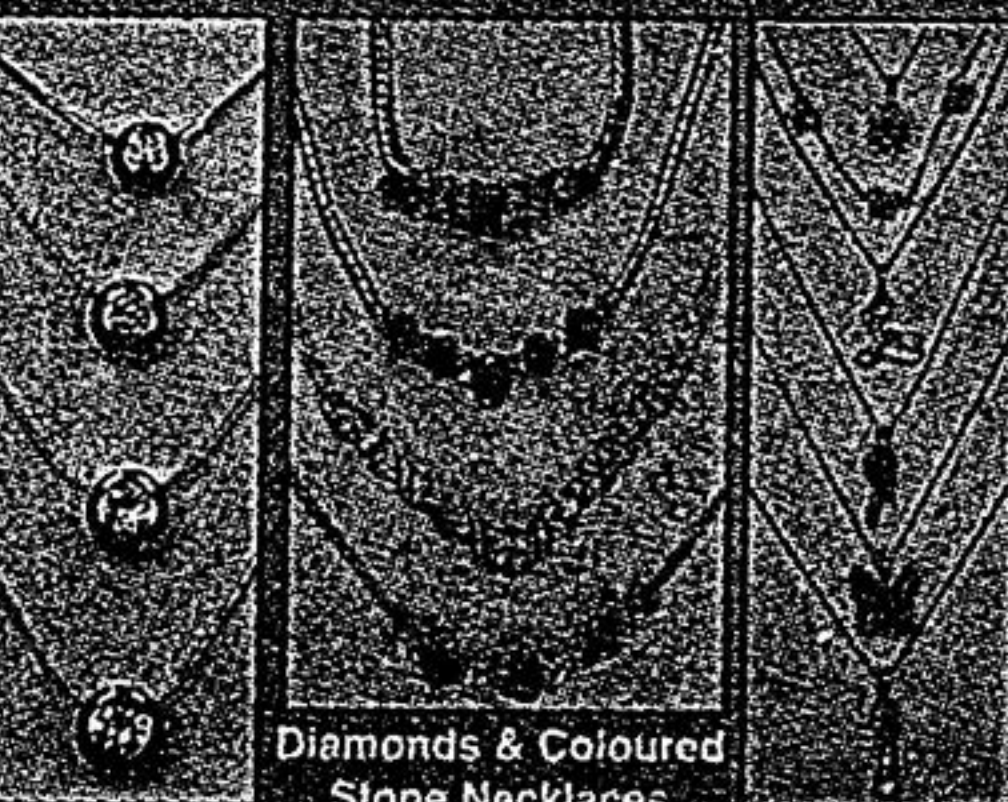
"What's happening now is we have some boards with policies and some without. Even in those boards with good plans, it has to get down to the school level."

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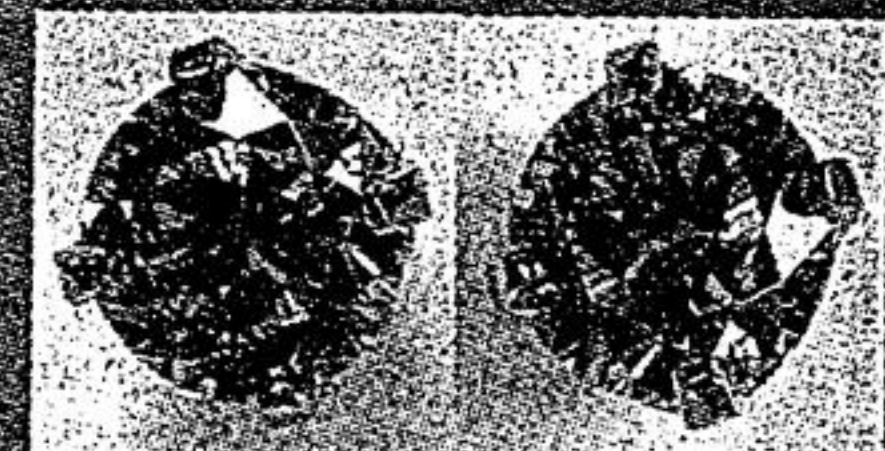
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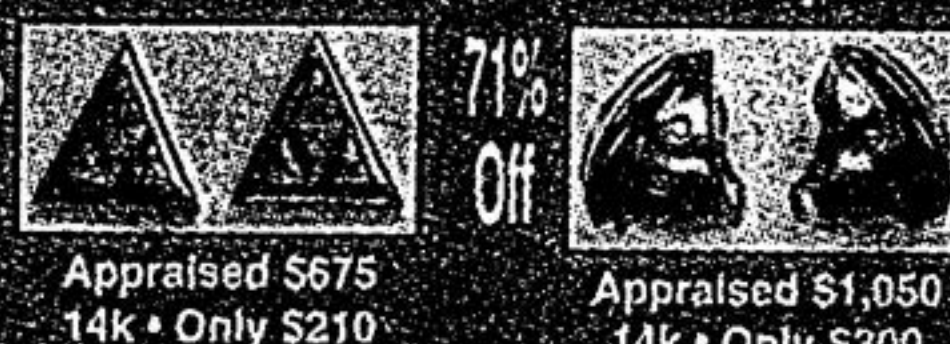


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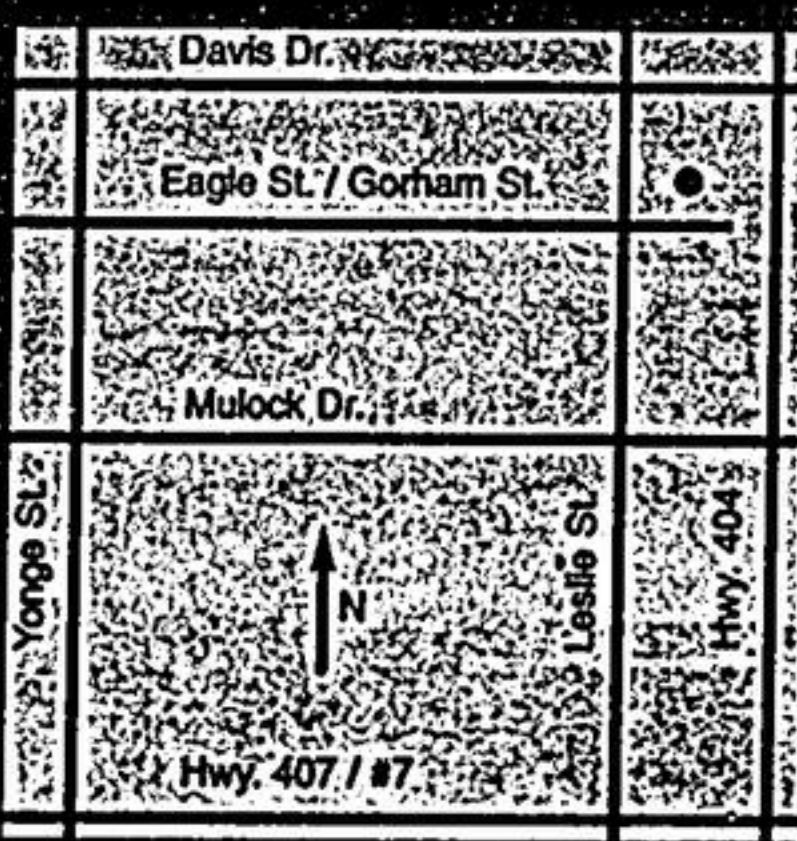
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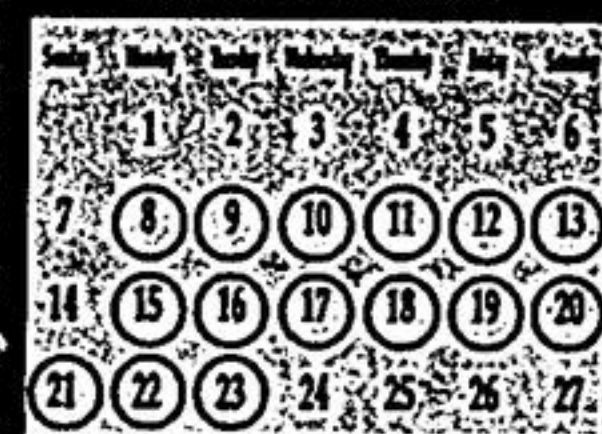
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