

# Firefighters hope rain will slow grassfires

## Outdoor fire bans in effect in many communities

BY ROGER VARLEY AND JOHN SLYKHUIS  
Staff Writers

"It's a tinderbox out there."

That's how Vaughan Fire Department deputy fire chief Greg Senay describes the conditions causing numerous grass fires throughout York Region.

Homeowners, particularly in rural areas, are being warned grassfire season has arrived and open fires are not permitted.

"The fire needs to be contained in a fire pit or, better yet, a barrel," Georgina fire Chief Bill O'Neill said. "People also have to be aware of their surroundings and ensure there aren't any combustibles nearby."

Recent dry weather caused dead grass and brush to dry out and become flammable. Relief, in the form of showers, was predicted for mid-week.

"A little rain today will help," deputy chief Senay said Wednesday, noting the storm that dumped up to 10 centimetres of snow on the region at the beginning of the month did little to alleviate the danger.

"The snow melted so fast it just ran off," he said. "Underneath was dead grass and the new grass hasn't

started to grow yet." Vaughan firefighters have been battling three to four grass fires a day for the past week, deputy chief Senay said.

The grassfire season will continue until the new grass and brush begins to grow and green up, he said. "That's usually over about six weeks."

Until then, homeowners are asked to be on alert.

Whitchurch-Stouffville has had an open-air fire ban in place for a week.

It was initiated after firefighters battled a stubborn grass fire on St. John Sideroad last Thursday.

"The fire got into a wooded area," deputy chief Paul Stover said. "I've never seen such a dry spring."

As well, Whitchurch-Stouffville firefighters fought a grass fire on McCowan Avenue on Saturday. Deputy chief Stover said the property owner has been charged with burning without a permit and burning during a fire ban.

Georgina firefighters were called out to a blaze in the south end of town last week.

A man lit a fire to toast marshmallows with his daughter, but quickly lost control of the blaze when wind caught a spark and set fire to dry grass.

Firefighters quickly had it under control.

The tinderbox conditions also led to a fire in the north-west corner of Vaughan

Saturday that scorched about 60 acres and also turned into a small forest fire when flames reached the bush.

Two days earlier, firefighters battled a grass fire stretching between five and seven kilometres along railroad tracks in the Martingrove Road area of Vaughan.

Apart from the fire along the railway tracks, deputy chief Senay said almost all grass fires can be traced back to human carelessness, such

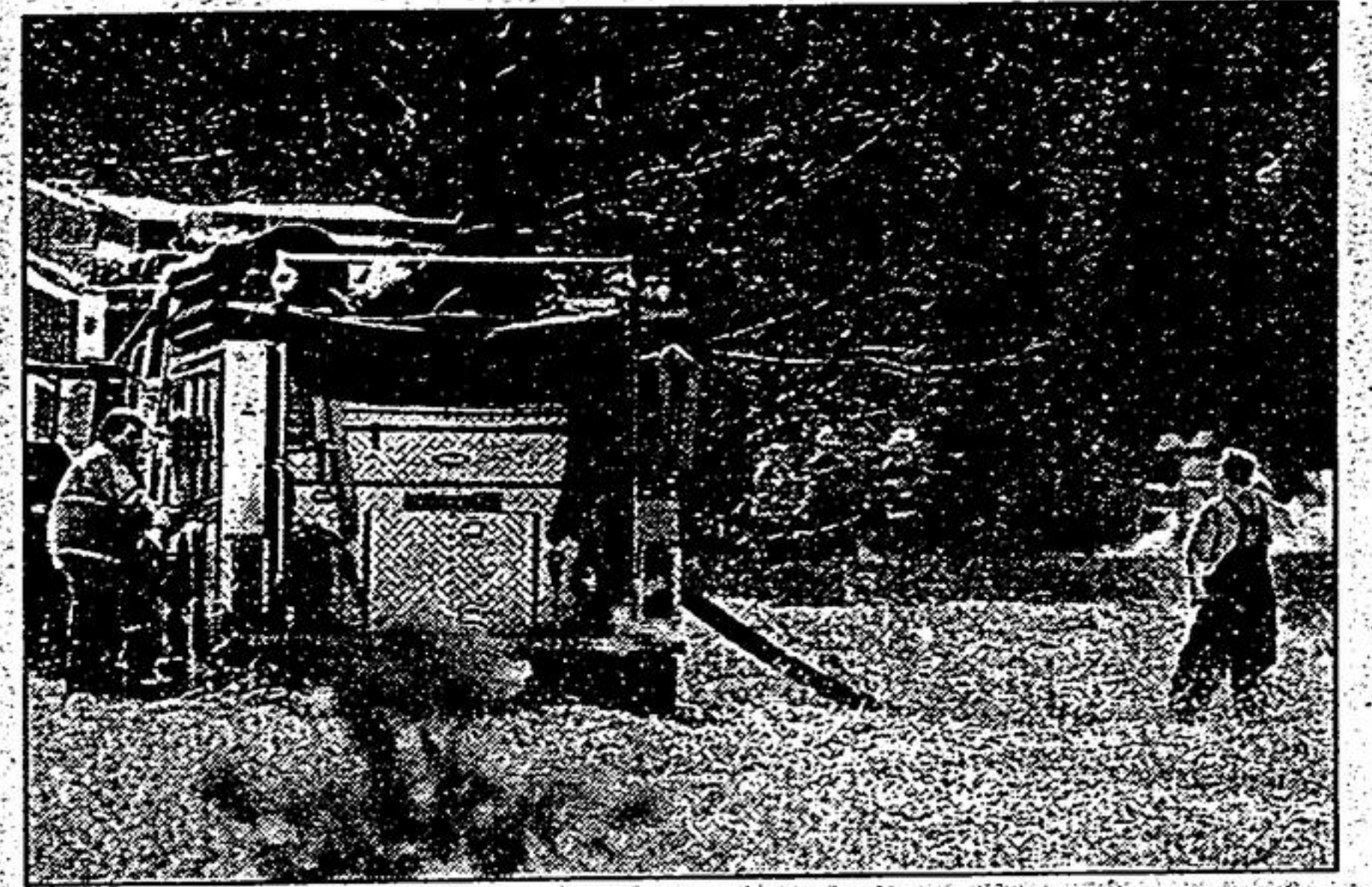
as people burning refuse or children playing with matches.

Anyone who is going to have an outdoor contained fire requires a fire permit, Chief O'Neill said.

Grass fires are not a serious problem in Markham.

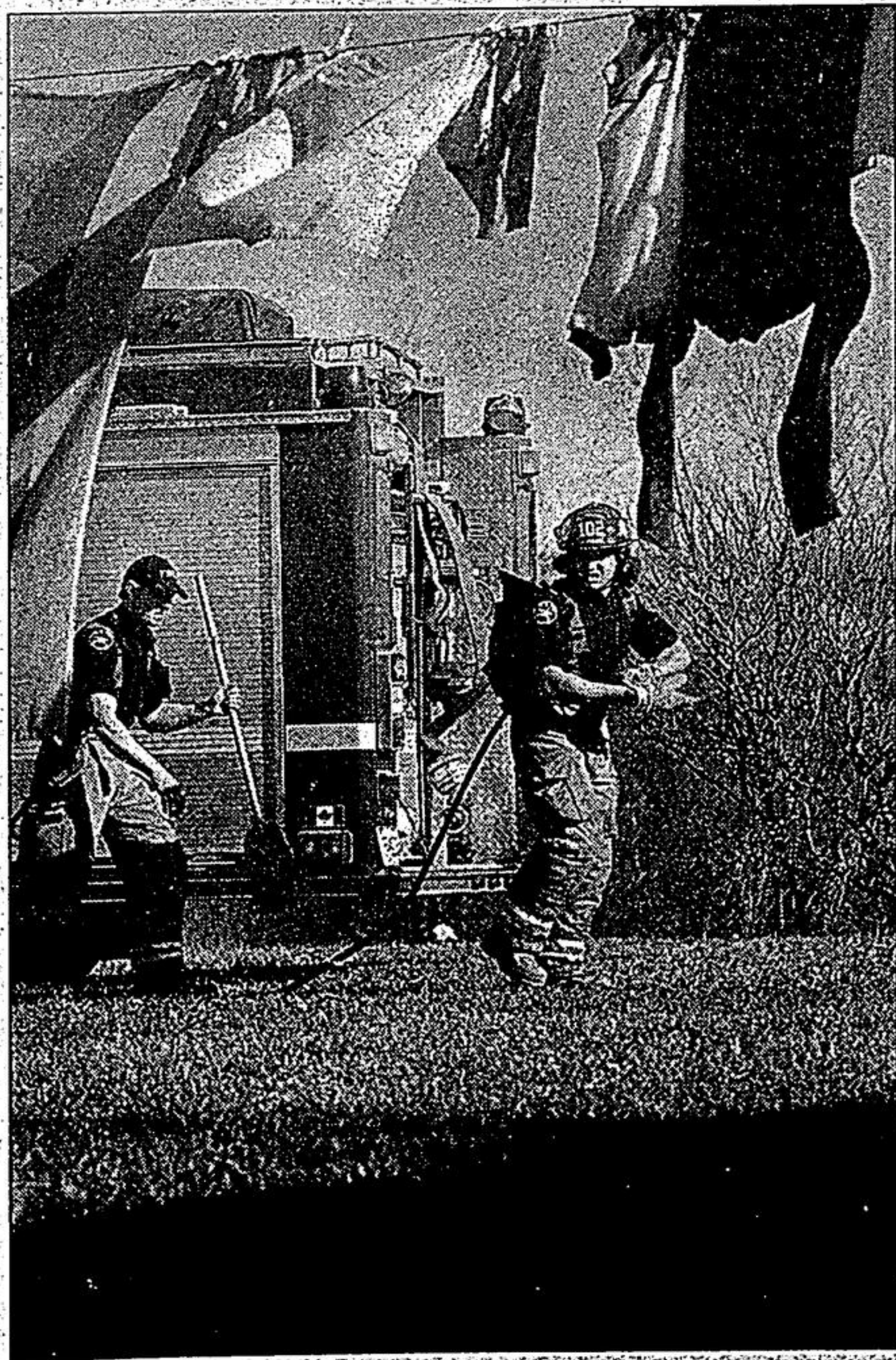
While there is no open air-fire ban in place, Markham fire officials are reminding residents that a permit is needed for an open-air fire.

With files from Joan Ransberry.



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

The crew of the Whitchurch-Stouffville forest fire van helps East Gwillimbury firefighters battle a large grass and brush fire south of Ravenshoe Road near Woodbine Avenue Monday afternoon.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Firefighters scrambled to contain a grass fire that threatened two homes on Main Street north of Roger's Reservoir Monday. A second grass fire broke out near Woodbine Avenue and Boag Road while firefighters were still on the scene of the first one.

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