

Gas leak re-ignites opposition

Mall demolition wreaking havoc on Don Mills area, opponents charge

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A potentially deadly gas leak that was ultimately contained by Toronto firefighters was enough to touch off a new round of criticism of demolition work being carried out at Don Mills Centre.

Police and fire crews responded Aug. 30 to the parking lot of the centre where contractors for Cadillac Fairview had hit and ruptured a three-inch gas main. The incident was relatively minor, but the gas leak could have turned deadly if fire crews hadn't acted so quickly, says Mike Strapko, acting chief for Toronto Fire Services.

"Heavy equipment (the contractors were using) hit the main," he said, explaining that about 20 firefighters were able to stop the leak by using equipment to pinch both sides of the gas main. "We were fortunate that the police and fire crews got there on time."

If left unattended a leaking gas line could have spelled disaster for the area, the chief commented. It could have created a fatal explosion.

Local resident Simone Gabbay, who is also a member of a group opposed to the demolition of the

centre, charges that the demolition work is wreaking havoc on the surrounding area. She cites the gas leak and a Sept. 5 incident in which phone cables to the nearby Dominion grocery store were severed as examples of the activity proving a nuisance for area businesses that are still standing.

The later incident left the Dominion store without telephone service for 24 hours. Debit and credit card machines also went offline, forcing the store to accept only cash transactions. Phone service and cash machines were restored by the following afternoon.

Cadillac Fairview, however, claims the situation had nothing to do with the current demolition of the centre.

"According to a detailed report filed earlier today (Sept. 8), this failure was not the result of any Cadillac Fairview-related demolition activities being carried out on the site," said spokesperson Chris Wood. "A faulty cable connection was determined to be the source of the problem and was an issue that was tended to and resolved by Bell."

Gabbay, who belongs to the Concerned Don Mills Residents for Maintaining the Don Mills Centre Indoor Mall, said she has become afraid for her safety because of the recent incidents.

She said the gas leak makes her question what is really taking place

at the centre in terms of its demolition — and if everything is being done up to code.

"Incidents like these are extremely disturbing for Don Mills residents, as they are serious threats to our safety and are painful reminders of the persistent lack of concern that Cadillac Fairview has shown for this community," she wrote in an email to the *Town Crier*.

Strapko said it is still unbelievable that contractors fail to act accordingly when they are digging up a site, which could contain a gas line.

It's the law for individuals or contractors to call a provincial hotline before beginning to dig, he said.

But Wood contends contractors acted accordingly by following onsite safety guidelines and calling both 911 and Embridge to alert

them of the leak. He said Cadillac Fairview is very concerned with the demolition of the centre and is doing everything it can to minimize effects on the area.

"If people have specific concerns, I invite them to contact us," he said.

The severity of a gas leak was seen on April 24, 2003 when seven people were killed by a resulting explosion at a plaza near Bloor St. West and Popular Ave.