

Mounting frustration for evacuees

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AARON VINCENT ELKAIM/TORONTO STAR

Evacuee Tony Testa expresses his anger at city officials for not getting Downsview residents back into their homes quicker after the Aug. 10, 2008 explosion at nearby Sunrise Propane.

Angry residents still waiting to go home displeased with the lack of information being provided by city

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Staff Reporter

The people who had the pink pieces of paper were pleased. The people who did not were not.

Most of the people evacuated Sunday from the Downsview neighbourhood near Sunrise Propane were permitted to return to their homes by Monday night. Passes distributed yesterday at Ancaster Public School allowed dozens more to bypass the police checkpoints on their streets.

Upon their returns, they checked for damage – several of them reported none or little – and delighted in simple pleasures: their own beds, their own bathrooms, their own comfortable clothes.

But the people who live in about 70 homes in the immediate vicinity of the Murray Rd. blast site were forced to wait further as their streets were cleared of asbestos. Worried their houses might be severely damaged, still unable to grab the money or medication they left behind in

their haste, some expressed frustration with city officials, who provided no information about when they might be able to go back.

"When fire services is able to give an update, they will," Mayor David Miller said at a morning news conference.

Spalding Rd., Plewes Rd. and the north side of Katherine Rd. west of Garratt Blvd. remained off-limits. Regent Rd. and the south side of Katherine were opened to residents who obtained passes.

As she handed her pink slip to a police officer in the mid-afternoon, Sandi Roher, who lives three houses from Murray on Regent, apologized to him for her hygiene. She had not showered in three days.

"I'm so stinky, I can't even stand myself," she said.

Thinking her hot water would not work, she said she would happily settle for a cold shower. But when the 57-year-old turned on her taps and the water unexpectedly ran warm, she broke into unbridled laughter.

Johny Gabrielli, meanwhile, stood at the corner of Regent and Garratt and stewed. He lives on Spalding, less than 100 metres from the blast site.

"We're getting more information from our neighbours than we're getting from anyone else," he said.

"I'm frustrated. I want to see my home. I want to see my home, I want to get some stuff. I don't want to go spending thousands of dollars when I don't have to."

Outside Ancaster Public School, Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti, who represents adjacent York West, spoke to about 20 neighbourhood residents late in the afternoon in place of York Centre Councillor Maria Augimeri, who he said was on her way back from an abbreviated vacation.

Italian-born senior citizens asked him about the safety of their garden-grown vegetables from airborne asbestos.

Tony Sorella, 43, repeatedly asked why he could not find out whether his house was among those officials believe has serious structural damage.

"They're not telling me if my address is one of them," said Sorella, who lives four houses from Murray on Spalding. "We're not getting a straight answer."

There were few remnants of the blast on Wilson Ave. Almost all of the businesses whose windows were shattered had new glass panes by mid-afternoon.

Debris, including a piece of a tanker truck, continued to litter the grounds of Mount Sinai Memorial Park cemetery, which conducted burials but did not permit people to visit its graves.