



Propane plant neighbours voice worries

TheStar.com - GTA



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Frank DeFazio, standing, voices concerns about asbestos at a meeting at St. Norbert's church, just blocks from the Sunrise Propane blast site, on Aug. 14, 2008.

A community seeking reassurance packs meeting; asbestos hazard among top concerns

August 15, 2008

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Staff Reporter

Questions about health and safety in the aftermath of last weekend's propane explosion topped the list of concerns of residents who packed a community meeting at a North York church last night.

But some just wanted to vent about what happened early last Sunday, forcing 12,000 of them from their homes. Seven families remain unable to return.

"No person should ever go through the trauma this community has sustained," said one woman. She wanted to know what kind of help is available to children in the area "who can't sleep at night because of nightmares."

Officials with both the Catholic and Toronto school boards said work is being done to ensure support is in place, including psychologists, if needed, when school starts in a few weeks.

Another resident complained that her plans to downsize have been thwarted. "Nobody is

going to want to buy a house here," she said.

Representatives from government, health, safety, insurance, police and fire officials were also on hand at St. Norbert Catholic Church. The Technical Standards and Safety Authority, which is being sued by area residents, declined an invitation to attend, saying it would be legally inappropriate.

During his opening remarks, organizer Tony Di Santo, president of the Ancaster Ratepayers Association, said the information session was about "restoring the neighbourhood to its original state." It was not to be, he said, a discussion about how Sunrise Propane Industrial Gases was "allowed to be here" in the Keele St. and Wilson Ave. area. "That will come later."

Most took that to heart and instead peppered public health doctor Howard Shapiro with questions about the threat posed by asbestos.

While he played down the health risks associated because he said there is a "relatively small amount," several residents reacted angrily, saying he was minimizing the risks.

"How much asbestos was released?" shouted one man.

There were also a number of emotionally charged questions about how the crisis was handled. A man who suffered burns from the blast demanded to know why it took him 90 minutes to find an ambulance.

The ratepayers association was the first to arrange a meeting, but Councillor Maria Augimeri – who told its president to shut up earlier this week after he questioned her commitment to the community, held her own meeting last night.