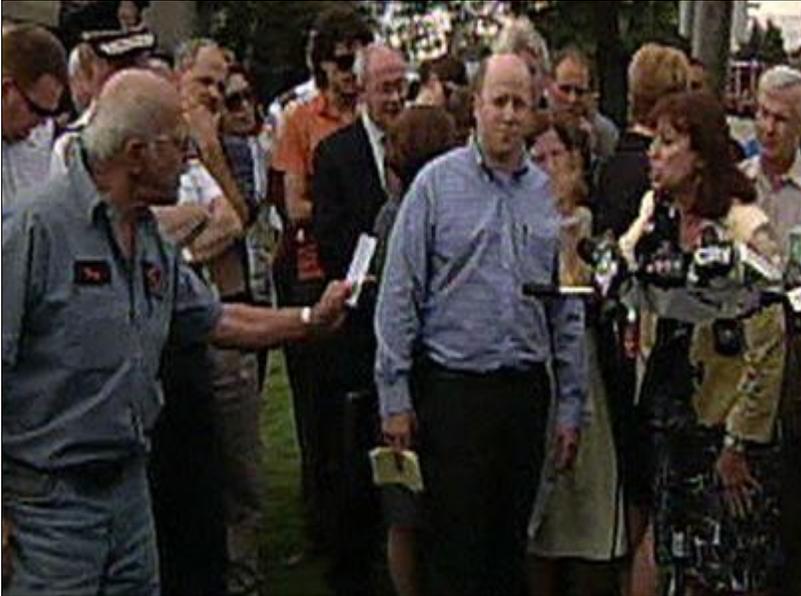




'Shut up!' Councillor at propane blast site erupts

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Councillor Maria Augimeri, right, and Tony Di Santo, left, president of the local Ancaster Ratepayers Association, break out into a shouting match on Aug. 13, 2008.

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Steps away from the massive propane blast that tore up her ward Sunday, local Councillor Maria Augimeri yesterday blew up at a constituent who questioned her commitment to the community, telling him to "shut up."

They broke into a shouting match after Tony Di Santo, 69, crashed a city news conference about a batch of asbestos discovered Tuesday evening at neighbourhood daycare and community centres.

Di Santo, president of the local Ancaster Ratepayers Association, stepped in front of the camera and forcefully demanded that Augimeri – who had just returned from an interrupted visit to Italy – attend a community meeting tonight instead of a city meeting scheduled for the same time.

He said the councillor's refusal to change her plans showed a blatant disregard for the residents and their tragic experience.

"If people have problems of a partisan nature they should not be using the death of a

firefighter ... so shut up!" Augimeri yelled.

The councillor's reaction to a man who has been giving voice to victims of the blast sent waves of shock and outrage through a crowd of about 50 distraught about their three-day ordeal.

"She's not aware of her community," said resident Valentina Manzo, who scolded the councillor after the conference.

"She told us to shut up. How unprofessional is that?"

Augimeri says she has "no regrets" about her response to Di Santo.

"I would do it again in a heartbeat," she said later.

Augimeri, who has ties to the New Democratic Party, said Di Santo has been involved with a local Liberal party riding association and that his comments to her at the news conference were "partisan."

"He's been abusive with me for many years verbally," she said, adding "he doesn't deserve my respect."

"I don't think he's interested in problem-solving. He's more about finger pointing," she told the *Star*.

"I'm very short-tempered and he's so in your face," she added.

Di Santo says he has voted Liberal in the past few elections, but denies any ties with political groups.

"I am a Liberal, but what difference does it make?" he asked.

Augimeri said she was tired after a long trip that included a 14-hour flight delay. "But it doesn't compare to what these people went through."

Councillor Shelley Carroll, the only other councillor present at the event yesterday in North York, called the "shut up" remark "regrettable."

"But it's also understandable if you witnessed the behaviour she (Augimeri) was confronted with," Carroll said, adding that Di Santo didn't want information, he just wanted to "vent."

It's not the first time Augimeri's temper has flared in a public forum.

About two years ago she shouted, "Admit it, you're stupid," at fellow Councillor Frances Nunziata during a council debate over an apartment project Augimeri opposed.

Last summer, she called Premier Dalton McGuinty a "coward" and a "man of inaction" after he said he had no imminent plans to bail Toronto out of a deficit.

Augimeri's mouth got her into hot water last year with the city's integrity commissioner, David Mullan.

Mullan recommended she apologize for "reckless remarks" she made in the 2006 municipal election campaign, when she left a voice-mail message with a local MP to the effect that another councillor was under police investigation.

Augimeri claimed Mullan's findings were "wrong" and council backed her up, voting to ignore his directions.