

Fire alarm apathy has York officials worried

By DANIEL WOLGERLERENTER

False alarms in the Ross Building on October 5 and 22 have York fire officials worried that student apathy may lead to serious injuries in the future.

"Students are complacent because the University has been safe from really large fires," said York Fire Marshal John Colpitts. He said that this complacency may bring trouble in the long run.

Director of York Occupational Health and Safety David Kurosky said that "people are just not responding to the fire alarms." He said that although the system has many false alarms, this is no excuse for not evacuating properly.

"It doesn't wash," he said.

The most recent incident occurred Sunday at 1 p.m., when a smoke detector was activated in Central Square by a smoke machine being used by a film crew.

Alan Grad, a first-year Arts stu-

dent who was there, said, "I walked into the building and heard the alarm ringing. I figured that if no one was walking out, why should I?"

"If there was a fire, it seemed like no one would have cared less," he said.

York officials were more concerned about an incident on October 5 when an alarm was ringing during the afternoon for "at least an hour," according to Kurosky.

"Professors were still conducting lectures and students were still walking around," he said.

The alarm turned out to be caused by a smoke bomb in a Curtis lecture hall. Kurosky said the experience was "scary... We really believed we had a fire."

Colpitts is worried that those who ignore alarms may make it difficult for Fire Wardens to evacuate a building. "If there is a fire, they shouldn't have to argue with someone who doesn't want to leave."

"We're not a policing agency. It's

the student's own responsibility," he said.

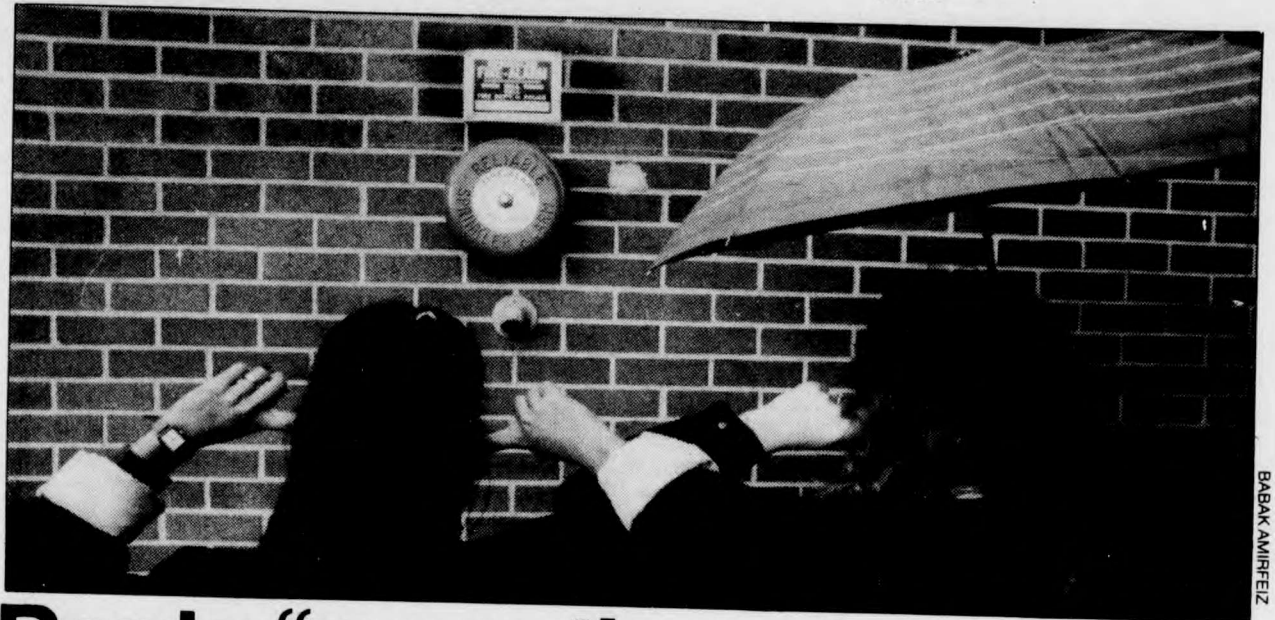
Colpitts said that volunteers in every building are trained as Fire Wardens, responsible for the evacuating of students and staff in a fire. He doesn't believe that they have failed in their responsibilities

because Fire Wardens cannot force anyone out of a building during an alarm.

Officials are at a loss as to how to encourage people to evacuate buildings promptly. There are no fines for remaining inside a building during an alarm.

"I don't think that fines would be appropriate," Kurosky said.

Colpitts said that York could not impose its own fines anyway, since they would have to come from the North York Fire Department or from the Ontario Fire Marshal's office.



BABAK AMIRFEIZ

Bill 11 too weak: OFS

By SCOTT GOODMAN and NANCY PHILLIPS

The Rental Housing Protection Act expires at the end of June, and the Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) is worried that the replacement bill will be even weaker than the existing legislation.

"Students need access to affordable housing," said OFS Researcher Duncan Ivison. The OFS has recently joined the Coalition for the Protection of Rental Housing (CPRH), a lobby group concerned about the loss of affordable housing in Ontario. Other members of the coalition include Foodshare, churches, legal service organizations and women's groups.

The Rental Housing Protection Act — otherwise known as Bill 11 — states that any newly planned construction, renovation, or demolition must first receive municipal approval. Ivison said that Bill 11 is weak because it does not apply to vacant buildings.

Many landlords want to convert affordable housing into luxury apartments or condominiums, he said, and "some landlords use coercion or any means they can to evict tenants, and then are free to convert to condominiums or anything else they wish."

Ivison added that the bill does not apply to buildings in municipalities of fewer than 25,000 people, or to buildings with fewer than five apartments.

Landlords are getting around the law by offering tenants cash to move out, or by letting people stay but turning off electricity or heat, said Ivison. "The problem is that enforcement of the bill is being ignored by the government. Only one landlord has been prosecuted for failure to respect the bill."

"The government shows a lack of concern about affordable housing."

The first indication is that the replacement bill will be weaker than the existing one, said Ivison, "The government feels it is being unfair to landlords by restricting conversions to condominiums. It is leaning towards them, rather than to tenants," he said.

Susan Taylor, Co-ordinator of the government's Rental Housing Protection Programme, defended government commitment by saying that it "investigates all complaints lodged by tenants."

Minister of Housing Chaviva Hosek was unavailable for comment.

The OFS expects to see a draft of the new rental housing bill in the upcoming months.

Rents "more than double"

By DANIEL WOLGERLERENTER

York students looking for housing in August and September faced rent increases over last year that were more than double the rate of inflation, according to figures released last week by the Office of Student Affairs' Off-Campus Housing Service.

Off-Campus Housing Director Tony Mercuri estimated that rent during those two months was on average 10 per cent higher than last year, while the rate of inflation over the same period was only 4.2 per cent. The increases occurred despite a jump in number of listings reported by the service — five per cent more this September than in September 1987 and 122 per cent more this August than in August 1987.

Mercuri said that although it is "bad that there were rent increases," the situation was probably inevitable given the housing situation in Metro. He added that the current "housing market has given the student a lot of choices" and that "they have the opportunity to be very picky." He also said that the service has instituted new listing policies aimed at making the hunt for decent housing easier, such as not listing

shared accommodations over \$400.

Joan McNeil, Researcher for the Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) said that the increased rents are a "symptom of the low vacancy rate" in Metro that she estimated at .1 per cent. Compounding the problem is the loss of approximately 1,200 apartment units per year in Metro.

McNeil added that the OFS is extremely concerned over North York's plan to consider an exclusionary by-law which would limit the number of non-related people allowed to occupy the same house to five. According to McNeil, this would pose problems for students who live in unofficial boarding houses or in shared dwellings, as well as decrease the number of available spaces for new students next year.

OFS Chairperson Shelly Potter said that while she is discouraged that rents have climbed since last year, York students are still getting "apartments for cheaper on average" than many students in the city, and that students at Ryerson and the University of Toronto are "having a much tougher time."

The average price of a one-bedroom apartment in Metro is

\$900, according to the OFS. The average price for one-bedroom apartments listed by the York Off-Campus Housing Service in August and September was about \$600.

MPP Brad Nixon, Parliamentary Assistant to Housing Minister Chaviva Hosek, said that "students at York are experiencing the same thing as many other people in Metro Toronto. 'It's a monstrous problem.'" Nixon added that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities has allocated almost \$8.5 million for 802 new residence spaces to be built on campus. In addition, he said that the provincial government is also opposed to the exclusionary by-laws proposed in North York and is working toward their prevention.

Nixon noted that the government is "very concerned" about the plight of students searching for off-campus housing and says that his government's solution, "both long-term and short-term, is to provide more supply." He thinks the new residence spaces are a step in the right direction and adds "we're doing an awful lot with limited funds."

The OFS disagrees. McNeil said "the government just hasn't tackled the problem."

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