

a ghost town



Corner of Highway 5 and 10 at rush hour Monday afternoon

GORM LARSEN/THE TIMES

A picture of a suburban ghost town

Only a few remain amid deserted streets and empty shopping plazas

By JOHN STEWART
Times staff writer

It had to be part of a movie — all of this unreal, haunting silence in the streets of Mississauga.

That was the overwhelming impression Monday as The Times toured the normally bustling byways of the city and found . . . nothing.

Looking up the long, empty streets it was difficult not to expect a bit of tumbleweed to blow by, and to see Gary Cooper step out of the shadows into the road. But this was no movie.

It was a picture of a volunteer ghost town. Canada's ultimate bedroom community had its pillows temporarily expropriated.

The traffic signals still worked and most of the few cars venturing along the roads did seem to honor them. The squirrels were having a heyday without the normal distracting clatter from schoolchildren and cars.

Although it was difficult to find pedestrians on the main arteries, there was evidence of some life on neighborhood streets.

There was a jogger in Meadowood. In Park Royal, two men had returned to their home for a prized possession — a dog named, optimistically enough, Hope.

The men told the police that they wanted to get past the barriers to move a transport truck out for business, which was true. They didn't tell the police that their main goal was to rescue the dog, who was left behind when eight people piled into the car the night before to evacuate.

Todd Henry and Jeff Sando were walking a dog, too. The high school students stayed up all night, listening to the radio. They even had relatives over. Todd's uncle was visiting. The two got out of the house for a walk "looking for a human", said Todd.

They weren't worried about the danger because they were monitoring the radio, and thought "you can probably see it or hear it" before any chlorine gas would strike.

Across the road Joan Romary was also out walking the dog. She was surprised with the degree of co-operation in the evacuation. "We were not convinced it was actually terribly dangerous," Mrs. Romary explained. Being close to the west end of the city, she and her husband expected to be able to make a quick exit. They didn't want to have to drive to Niagara Falls to get a hotel, however, she said, in reference to shortage of accommodation.



GORM LARSEN/THE TIMES

Scott Shaddock stayed home and raked leaves

For entertainment, the Romarys have been watching news reports of the events, and Sunday night they listened on the short-wave to the nearby evacuation of Sheridan Villa.

"If we lived a mile or two miles away, we wouldn't be so blasé," she said. "We have to be grateful that people are thinking of our safety."

But she added that "you've also got to be careful that everyone doesn't jump on the bandwagon. Next thing, they may be evacuating to Burlington."

Nineteen-year-old Scott Shaddock got some exercise on the bright autumn Monday afternoon by raking some leaves in front of his Spring Road home. He couldn't explain why he and his father had stayed. He said it wasn't because they didn't realize — that there was potential danger. Shaddock had smelled chlorine the afternoon before while working at his job at Port Credit Harbor.

The nearest place to stay would be with an uncle in Barrie. Fear of looters had no part in the decision to stay.

All of those interviewed felt one common emotion Monday — the unsettling feeling that comes from being in the middle of a city that's been temporarily transformed into a suburban ghost town.