

Mock disaster training exercise held at Maynooth Public School



By **Mike Riley**

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According to a May 2 press release on the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board website, and reposted on the Municipality of Hastings Highlands website, Maynooth Public School hosted a mock disaster training exercise involving local authorities on May 6. Hastings Highlands deputy fire chief Mike Bendell (on behalf of the Hastings Highlands Fire Department and Fire Chief Bryce Robinson), Melanie Zeitz-Morrish, energy and environmental technologist/asbestos coordinator with the HPEDSB and Alex Beatty, consultant with Beatty Petroleum Consulting Inc., comment on this mock disaster training exercise.

The mock disaster training exercise at Maynooth Public School occurred on May 6 and simulated a propane leak where the emergency could not be contained, as determined by the fire department, and the school would be forced to evacuate to another location.

The exercise involved select HPEDSB staff, the propane vendor, Kelly's Fuels, and the Maynooth Fire Department and focused on emergency response to the scenario. Students and most staff were not present, as the exercise was planned for a Saturday to avoid learning disruption and undue alarm, but emergency vehicles and personnel were there at the site for this simulation. The organizers stressed that there would be no danger to anyone at the school or in the surrounding area during this training exercise, and to take away any remaining concerns, they were in touch with the school's immediate neighbours to explain what was going on.

According to the press release, Maynooth Public School has quantities of propane that are detailed in the Environmental Emergency Regulations 2019 that require an Environmental Emergency Plan. The regulations, made under the Environmental Protection Act 1999 were put in place to reduce instances of hazardous substances being released and to improve capacity to deal with these environmental emergencies. The regulation applies to any organization that has any hazardous substance listed in the regulations, as in Maynooth Public School's case with their propane.

As propane related emergencies differ from other building emergencies, each year school administrators and custodial staff receive training about how to respond to these scenarios. Every five years, for which 2023 is year five, the plan must be exercised through mock disaster training and simulation, the HPEDSB explains in the May 2 media release.

Bendell, on behalf of the Hastings Highlands Fire Department and Fire Chief Bryce Robinson, had the following comment for Bancroft This Week on the exercise;

?The Hastings Highlands Fire Department is proud to partner with the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board on this mock disaster training exercise. It's a way for us to work together to keep the community safe,? he says.

On the day of the mock disaster training exercise, May 6, Zeitz-Morrish from the HPEPSB, officials from the Maynooth Public School, Beatty, and the Hastings Highlands Fire Department were on hand to deal with a simulated propane leak that prompts the evacuation of the school and the surrounding homes and businesses. Zeitz-Morrish said that the Kelly's Fuels representative was not present, but was available by telephone if necessary. The fire department even had a smoke machine on hand to make the appearance of a propane leak seem realistic. Overall, it took an hour for this mock disaster training exercise to unfold to a safe conclusion, which was at least 30 minutes less than what Beatty had anticipated.

?It was an hour since we simulated pulling the fire alarm but the children were all safely evacuated out of the school to the municipal building gymnasium in five minutes and 20 seconds, which was two minutes faster than they expected. For us the important part is the safety of the children and to be sure they're off site. And all the rest of it is the fire department response and Melanie [Zeita-Morrish] and the school notifying the parents what's going on. As a secondary muster point, we located the Graphite Bible Camp [8.4 kilometres away from the school] as a very safe off-site place where the children can congregate and there's food available and washrooms and it's a great place because there's lots of parking for the parents to pick their children up and get the parents involved in this situation as well,? he says.

Beatty confirmed that the school already had an Environmental Emergency Plan and that doing a mock disaster training exercise every five years to ensure it worked well was part of fulfilling the regulations.

?The whole thing is if you uncover problems to address those problems. And other than internal modifications, there wasn't anything that was hugely problematic with our whole plan. We have some things that we might do in the future to make it better but as right now we had to deal with what we had right here. It went very well,? he says.

Zeitz-Morrish also thought the mock disaster training exercise went very well.

?So, we made some adjustments to our written [emergency] plan, which was the purpose of the exercise to find gaps and make corrections so we have a really solid plan.?