

Owner fined third time for neglecting vacant home

Fire department hopes \$25,000 gets attention of absentee owner

■ By David Lea
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

For most people a home is something to be treasured and maintained, but for one Oakville property owner his home commanded so little of his interest that he is now facing a massive fine for neglecting it.

The Ontario Court of Justice in Burlington handed the homeowner a \$25,000 fine, yesterday, for failing to abide by the Fire Protection and Prevention Act and the Ontario Fire Code subsection 2.4.7. which deals with vacant buildings.

Fire officials say the Heritage Way property was purchased for the man by his parents in the 1990s, but for whatever reason, he did not move in and chose instead to reside in a residence elsewhere.

Having left the house vacant, the owner was required by law to ensure that it was properly secured and visited regularly to make sure it remained so.

This was not the case with the property essentially left to rot.



DAVID LEA / OAKVILLE BEAVER

HEFTY FINE: The absentee owner of this home on Heritage Way was fined \$25,000 for failing to abide by the Fire Protection and Prevention Act and the Ontario Fire Code dealing with vacant buildings. It's the owner's third fine since 2002.

"We've been working with him for years to try and secure the property," said Michael Harrison, Public Education Officer, Oakville Fire Department.

"In quite a few situations we've actually gone there, through the provisions in the fire code, and actually entered into the property to secure it."

With the homeowner not responding to their requests, fire

officials have repeatedly boarded up the doors and windows to the home, at a cost to the owner, only to return and find the home broken into a few weeks later.

"Vandals come back and we have to go back and secure it again because he, for whatever reason, is not doing it."

Fire officials are concerned about abandoned buildings like this one because they attract young people who use them as a

kind of clubhouse thereby creating a safety concern.

"Sometimes they sneak in through openings and can't get back out and they have to break a window or a door down to get out," said Harrison.

"This leaves the place open for even

animals to get trapped."

The risk of fire is also on the minds of fire officials as vandals have repeatedly set small fires in the house over the years.

Today, the Heritage Way home continues to sit empty with its boarded up exterior and leaf cluttered lawn creating the only dismal shadow in a neighbourhood that could otherwise be described as pristine.

To jar him out of his apparent complacency over the property, the homeowner has been repeatedly fined for leaving the property vacant and unsecured.

His first conviction of this offence on Aug. 13, 2002 resulted in a fine of \$4,500 while his second conviction on Nov. 14, 2006 slapped him with a fine of \$12,500.

Fire officials are hoping this latest fine of \$25,000 will inspire him to do something about his property, however, the outlook is not good as neither the homeowner nor his lawyer attended the court proceedings at which the fine was handed down.

"Hopefully he'll get the picture," said Harrison.

"We've done everything you could imagine to get him to keep the place secure. The next step is something the legal department will have to decide. I don't know what these next steps are."

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