

Residents get cheques as 'good faith gesture'

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Columbian Chemical doesn't believe it was to blame for the oily, black fallout over parts of east Hamilton last summer, but has sent \$250 cheques to 73 people who complained of damage to their homes and belongings.

In an unrelated action, the Environment Ministry reports that Stelco and Dofasco have hired a claims adjuster to determine losses suffered by Beach Strip residents when a "black snow" of coke and coal dust fell in February.

The steelmakers had earlier said they would split the cost of cleaning five of the worst-hit homes. The ministry has given them until May 31 to submit consultants' reports on measures to prevent such incidents.

David Ash, general manager of Columbian, which makes powdered carbon black in its plant on Parkdale Avenue, north of Burlington Street, sent a letter with the cheques.

It said, in part: "While none of the test results have identified Columbian as a major contributor to the dust issue, we consider it our duty as a good neighbour to support the community during this time. Therefore, as a good faith gesture, we are providing this cheque for \$250 to help address any inconvenience you may have suffered ..."

Brenda Johnson of Environment Hamilton said that organization received permission from more than 90 complainants to share their names with Columbian, which also relied on its own complaint list in deciding who received a cheque.

But Johnson said she and Lynda Lukasik, Environment Hamilton executive director, argued against the flat-rate payments, saying \$250 wouldn't even cover the insurance deductible for people who sustained heavy losses and that others had no permanent damage.

They said settling claims individually would cost less than the \$18,250 paid out, and suggested the saving be spent on equipment for a neighbourhood park.

Carl Slater, a senior Environment Ministry district official, said Stelco and Dofasco had sent all Beach community residents a letter inviting them to report dust damage so a professional adjuster could assess claims on a case-by-case basis.

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