

Press Release

**Part of the CN Workshops is destroyed by fire because of negligence  
on the part of the owner and municipal authorities,  
despite repeated warnings from citizens**

Montreal, November 15<sup>th</sup> 2008

Since the beginning of 2008, citizens and community organizations brought together by the Action Watchdog Community Coalition of Point St. Charles, have repeatedly appealed to the South-West borough to do something about the dangerous and disruptive use of the old buildings on the CN Lands. In addition to the pervasive presence of heavy trucks on these residential streets, the illegal use of these immense abandoned buildings by the company JC Fibers to store tons of paper has been a grave security concern to residents of the neighbourhood.

This illegal storage of tons of recycled paper began in 2007 in the CN Workshop buildings. The high risk of fire caused by the storage of paper in illegal and non-secure conditions was raised on many occasions to elected officials. Citizens sounded the alarm and requested immediate action to enforce the law and ensure public security.

After many months of pressure from the community, last July the South-West borough finally imposed a deadline on JC Fibers to empty the site and cease its operations by October 31st 2008 at the latest. Nothing was done. To the contrary, residents in the area reported that they continued to be disturbed by the constant coming and going of heavy trucks day and night. After October 31st, the borough took it upon itself to apply minimum fines to the company.

Actions were also taken with City of Montreal authorities. On May 26<sup>th</sup> 2008, a community resident received the following answer regarding her concerns about the risk of fire from the *Direction de la prévention et de l'intervention du Service de sécurité et d'incendie* : 'We want to reassure you that even if there is an occupation without a permit in this building, there is no danger for the population around. We did and will be continuing the follow-up of the file with the owners of the building to make sure that the by-laws about fire safety are respected and the building is secure'.

This turn of events proves the contrary. Community residents were correct that there was indeed a great danger that the municipal authorities chose to ignore. This event could have and should have been avoided. This is clearly a case of negligence for which consequences might have been much worse. Had there not been rain and were the winds not in our favour, this fire that has destroyed the North Complex on the CN Lands, might have also destroyed a large residential part of the community.

This fire comes at a time when the *Office of Public Consultations of Montreal* is holding consultations on the development of the CN lands, an area surface of 3,5 million square feet sold for the symbolic sum of \$1.00 under certain conditions to Vincent Chiara of Group Mach. It is also important to note that the building destroyed by the fire was designated as a reserved area by the Government of Quebec in favor of eventual use by the AMT for the maintenance of railcars, and negotiations have taken place between the owner and the AMT regarding transfer of the property.

The destruction of part of the CN Workshops, which represents a huge loss in terms of heritage, will have a significant impact on the future of this site. The entire community of Point St. Charles has the right to demand clear answers about all the circumstances related to yesterday's fire, including the intentions of the authorities, owners and occupants of the site and how these led to such blatant negligence. These events have only emphasized the complete loss of confidence of the population towards the owner, the borough and the City of Montreal.

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Source : Action-Watchdog, the community coalition of Point St. Charles  
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