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City mops up wet basements, floating debris

Waterproofing companies overwhelmed with calls from distraught homeowners

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The Globe and Mail, Toronto

Tenants, homeowners and city cleanup crews face a week of backbreaking, sometimes heart-breaking, work to clear the sodden detritus of the weekend's violent downpour.

While city workers will be fishing for tree limbs, stumps and debris that the storm Friday night and Saturday morning washed into Toronto's harbour, thousands of residents whose basements could not withstand the 70-millimetre deluge will be throwing out carpets and furniture and calling their insurance agents.

Waterproofing companies were inundated with calls from about midnight Friday through the weekend.

Angelo Garaci, who runs Watertite Waterproofers Ltd., said he received 10 times the volume of calls he gets after a normal rainstorm, 85 since Friday night.

He spent the weekend visiting the hardest-hit homes and assessing what work will have to be done.

Many of the callers, with 30 centimetres of water on their basement floors, were in a state of bewilderment and panic.

"One couple showed me a videotape they made of water jetting up 1½ feet into the air from their drains," Mr. Garaci said. "Their carpet and furniture and stereo stand were ruined."

As always happens to the tradesmen who specialize in repairs that people tend to defer, everyone wanted him there immediately.

"They want instant gratification," Mr. Garaci said with a chuckle. "They say, 'What do you mean you can't come out today?'"

Besides determining whether their foundations are cracked or whether the problem is merely

leaky window wells or backed-up pipes, Mr. Garaci dispenses advice to traumatized residents who envisage their hard-earned cash draining away with the floodwaters.

Insurance companies, he says, will pay for flood damage and even send out crews to help remove ruined articles, but they will not kick in any money to repair leaks.

Since most policies have a \$500 deductible, he suggests people not even bother their insurance agents if the damage is worth less than that. For example, if waterlogged broadloom is the problem, it's cheaper to get someone in to dry and steam-clean it.

Lynn Cavan, co-owner of City Wide Waterproofing, said the company was bombarded with calls on the weekend, 70 in comparison to the usual two or three.

"People were really distraught," she said. "They had so much water accumulating in their basements that they just didn't know what to do or who to call."

Many had no idea whether their

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insurance policies covered flood damage, she said.

"You need a specific clause in your policy, and the deductible is usually higher for water."

One private haulage company is offering needy residents its services



Inline skaters pass some of the debris left along the Don River by the 70-millimetres of rain that fell during Friday's storm. Many homeowners spent the weekend assessing the damage caused by water coming into their basements through windows, cracks or backed-up drains.

DEBORAH BAIC/The Globe and Mail

free this week so they can dispose of damaged items and debris.

Derick Ladurantye, who runs the company 1-800-GOT-JUNK, said he was watching television news during the storm and decided he wanted to help the thousands of poor Toronto residents living in basement apartments.

He said two of his company's six trucks will be offered without charge to haul away debris, including soil, wood and carpeting, for people who lack the means to pay.

"We have a staff of 15 ready to donate their time to help in the flood cleanup," Mr. Ladurantye said.

Police services and utilities put out press releases on the weekend warning people to call 911 immediately if basement flooding becomes so deep that it covers electrical outlets or extinguishes the pilot lights on natural-gas appliances.

Halton Regional Police advised residents to avoid going into

flooded basements because of the possibility of being electrocuted.

Police departments repeated warnings to parents not to allow their children near creeks and streams, where fast-flowing water can make a usually quiet stream dangerous.

A 19-year-old university student drowned in a storm-filled creek in Kitchener-Waterloo early on Saturday.

Aileen Proudfoot of Kirkland, Que., was returning with friends to her residence at the University of Waterloo after a party.

They walked along a path beside a normally small creek that had filled with rushing water from the rainstorm.

Ms. Proudfoot died after diving in to try to help a friend who had jumped into the creek and had been caught in the current of a submerged culvert.

Both of them were dragged underwater through the 15-metre

pipe. The friend was rescued downstream, but Ms. Proudfoot was not found until it was too late.

In Toronto Harbour, members of the police marine unit had to steer around floating tree stumps, logs and branches, and at least one floating picnic table, on the weekend.

Constable George Dee said workers from the Toronto Port Authority will begin today to haul these floating obstacles from the water, as well as clumps of cardboard, cans and garbage bags washed into the lake.

At the Ashbridge's Bay Yacht Club, work will begin to replace a dock ripped from its moorings when the heavy wind and rain forced sailboats beneath it.

"I've never seen anything like it," said club employee Catherine Fagan, who spoke for many sailors when she said she was glad she was not on the water when the surprise storm hit.