

5.6.3. Behaviour during the evacuation

The people who stayed behind fell into two groups; those who were known to the police and those who were not. Their behaviour patterns were very different.

Those who had contact with authorities felt free to walk or drive around the evacuated area. Some spent the time fixing things in the house during the enforced holiday from work. They were very aware of the quietness of the deserted streets and enjoyed the sensation of being alone in a deserted city. They did not have contact with other families and believed that there was no one else left in their area. Two men reported that they patrolled their neighbourhoods at night for prowlers and reported suspicious people to the police.

Some of these people also continued to go to work each day. They had to return through the police road block by stealth or by argument. One man drove each of his two cars as far as a road block on two successive nights and walked through the checkpoint each time. Others knew routes by foot and by car that avoided the road blocks. However, one father deliberately chose not to go to work so that at no time would the family be split up.

The other group of people remained in their homes to avoid detection. They believed that they would be asked to leave if the police knew that they were there. Some said that they had not been specifically asked to leave by police at the door. It is possible that this group includes an unknown number of older people living alone (shut-ins) who do not listen to radio or television nor have much contact with other people. Some of these people may not have understood what was happening. Others certainly did know and

deliberately concealed themselves in their basements and by turning off lights when they thought the police might see them.

It is likely therefore that the number of 1200 families from the surveys is an underestimate of the people who remained inside the cordoned area throughout the entire emergency.

5.7. ATTEMPTS TO RE-ENTER

About 14,500 people (19% of the main survey sample) tried to enter the restricted zone. Police transcripts indicate that later in the week of the evacuation, much of their time was spent escorting people to their homes and in dealing with requests from other, often angry, householders. The police perceived the many attempts to re-enter as a major problem for them.

The people who tried to re-enter came from a fair cross-section of Mississaugans and lived all over the city (there are no significant relationships between them and the rest of the sample in any socio-economic or locational variables). They were not people who were significantly more, or less, worried about the danger, although they were more critical about how the evacuation was handled. More of those who tried to return criticised the scale of the evacuation and the lack of information (Chi-square significant at .008 level).

The survey also shows that most people tried to return after they had been away for two days or more. The distribution indicates 2 peaks of re-entry activity (when

there were probably more than 3,000 attempts); on the third and sixth days that people were away from their homes (Figure 5.10).

Follow-up interviews with 32 householders who tried to return, shows that the 2 commonest reasons for the attempts were to look after pets and to fetch clothes (Table 5.14). Relatively few people went to find missing family members or to fetch vital medication. Some reasons were fairly trivial, such as to retrieve theatre tickets or tickets for the long-awaited Tutankhamen exhibition (in the event, people who said they were "Mississauga refugees" were let in without their tickets).

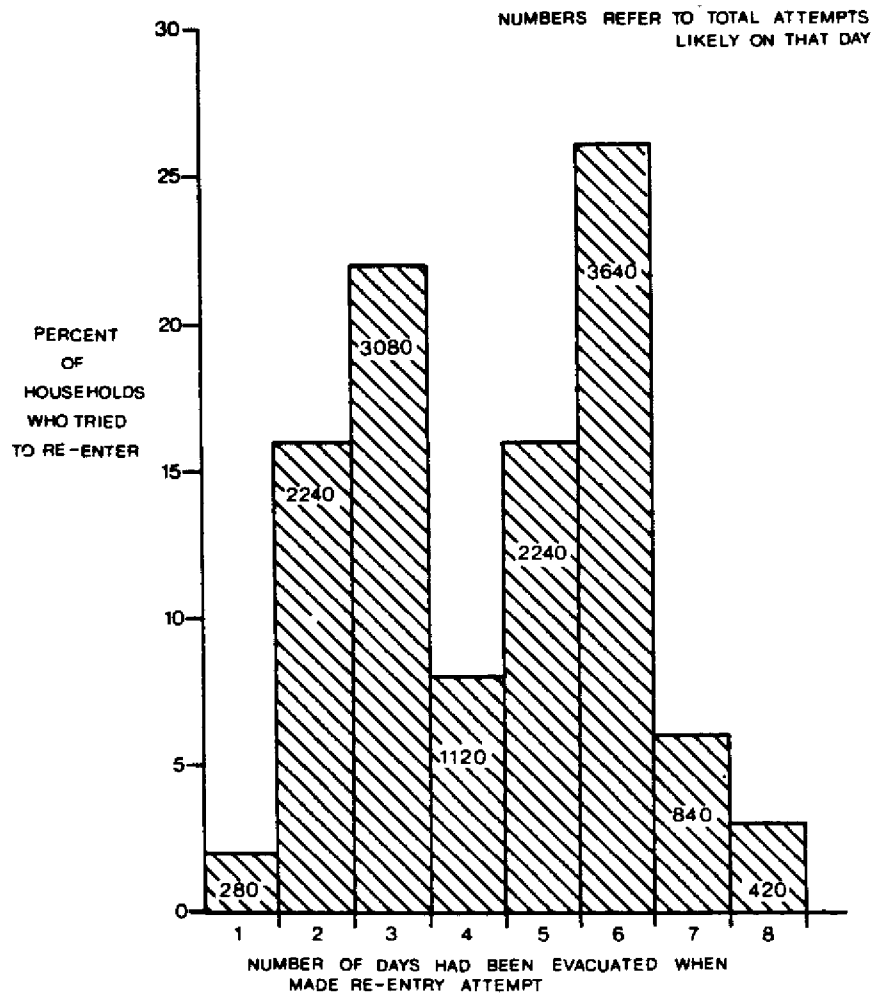
Table 5.14. Reasons why people tried to re-enter the evacuated area

| | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| To look after pets | 16 | 28 |
| To get clothes | 16 | 28 |
| To get medication | 4 | 7 |
| To find missing persons | 3 | 5 |
| To get travel documents, etc. | 4 | 7 |
| To get money, theatre tickets | 4 | 7 |
| To check house | 3 | 5 |
| To go home to stay | 4 | 7 |
| To get/return car | <u>3</u> | <u>5</u> |
| Total | 57 | 99% |

Number of people interviewed = 32; some had more than one reason.

Most people, if they succeeded in getting in, were at their homes a relatively short time. Police escorts would

FIGURE 5.10
WHEN PEOPLE TRIED TO RE-ENTER
THE EVACUATION ZONE



wait outside the house for 10 minutes or more (involving a large amount of police time) and unescorted people also report being inside the area for only a short time. However, a few people just wanted to go home, sometimes because they said they had no friends to stay with. Some of these people succeeded in entering the area and staying at home for the rest of the evacuation.

People who attempted to re-enter to collect possessions were mainly men. They tried a range of methods and some made several attempts. The methods included:

(a) requests to police:

- (i) phone requests;
- (ii) go to police station and receive police escorts;
- (iii) go to roadblock and either;
 - get pass and return it on departure,
 - leave driving licence and collect it on departure,
 - get police escort.

(b) avoidance of police:

- (i) go around roadblock, usually on foot by back routes.

The commonest method reported was to go to the roadblock and persuade, or argue with, the police officers on duty. It seems that the greatest chances of success were when the roadblocks were quiet. People would wait around until other would-be entrants had left the barricade again and would then persuade the police "just to let them go in". The police were also more likely to let people in later in the week and farther away from the accident site. Only one man contacted in the study reported that he was allowed in to Zone 1 (nearest the accident) before Wednesday, 14 November, and this was to search for a missing teenage daughter. Other people in the same zone who needed medication were refused.

Attempts to get inside the perimeter.....

Mrs. Q. went to stay with friends in Burlington but her daughter is asthmatic, and their dog made her ill. Mrs. Q. could not find a hotel room so she came home. She entered the evacuation zone by the back roads on Monday night and met no one.

The next day, she took her daughter to school and was stopped by the police as she drove home. They took her name and told her that she would be charged, but she has heard nothing from them. A detective finally told her to go back in.

Her next door neighbour also stayed behind because her husband was away and she had nowhere to go. They both felt fairly safe because the police patrolled the area every hour and her neighbour or herself took turns to listen to the radio for the latest reports.

Mr. E. came back on Wednesday to check on his cat. He was not sure if it was inside or outside the house as no one had been at home when their area was evacuated.

The police let him through the perimeter checkpoint and took his driving licence while he was inside. Mr. E. was out again in 15 minutes. He had no fears about the danger.

Mr. N.'s son entered the evacuation zone unseen, at night. He borrowed a canoe and paddled across the Credit River to his home which was just on the other side. He collected the family's tickets to the ballet for the following evening and paddled back across the River. No one stopped him.

Continued. . .

Mrs. W. went back to her apartment about 6 P.M. on Sunday to fetch her cat and some clothes. She found a way to enter the evacuation zone without being seen by the police. It was no problem.

It was lucky that she did go back because she discovered another tenant and her daughter who were still in the apartment block. They were unaware that anything had happened. In her block, the police had not gone door-to-door but had used loudhailers outside.

They all left together in Mrs. W.'s car.

After Wednesday, 13 of the people contacted were successful in entering Zones 1-8 near the accident.

Overall, 27 of the 37 attempts (some families tried more than once) that were investigated by the Study Team were successful. Police allowed people in to collect clothes, and to see their pets, despite the Ontario Humane Society (OHS) Emergency Feeding Programme (Section 6.11). Some of the pet owners did not know about the feeding programme or could not contact the OHS, but most did. They were still concerned about their pets, because they were very young animals, or were thought by their owners to be particularly vicious to strangers, or very sensitive to loneliness.

There were some ingenious, and successful, attempts to enter the evacuation zone without the knowledge of the police. Some boys walked along the railway tracks; another boy borrowed a canoe and paddled across the Credit River - all to get a family's tickets to the ballet.

The police did turn many people back, but even so, it is likely that between 1000 and 4000 people were going in and out of the evacuated zone each day after Monday, 12 November. Most of these people had no more valid reasons to enter a restricted area than did many thousands of others; they were simply more persistent.

The numbers of people allowed in had several effects:

- (a) they absorbed much police time;
- (b) they increased the number to be evacuated again if the situation at the accident site worsened suddenly.

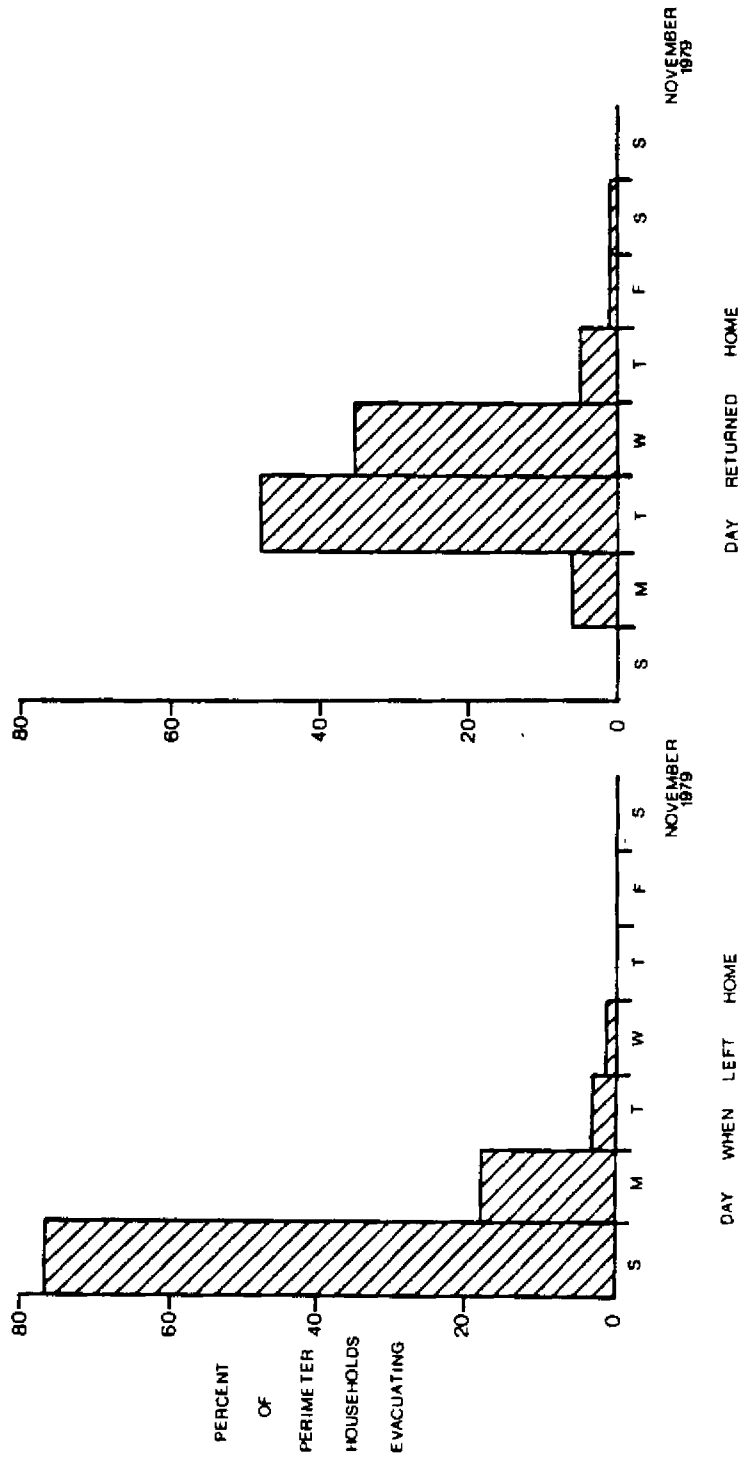
5.8. PEOPLE ON PERIMETER OF EVACUATION ZONE

Families living north of Burnhamthorpe Road were separately surveyed to find out the effects of the evacuation on people just beyond the boundaries. Three areas were surveyed (Figure A-1), located between 4 and 8 kilometers away from the accident. Overall, 59% of households report having completely evacuated. In an additional 4%, only part of the family (mainly mothers and children) left. There are no significant differences between the 3 areas in the numbers who evacuated compared to those who stayed at home, although they were different distances away from the accident.

Most of the families were together at the time of the accident (71%). Some of them went out to look at the derailment and then returned to bed. The majority (77%) of those who evacuated decided to leave the following day (Sunday, 11 November). Almost all the others left on Monday, 12 November (Figure 5.11). Most of these families did not expect to be away for more than one day and did not take any overnight things. They tried to return on Sunday night and Monday but were refused entry by police because of the need to go along the evacuation perimeter road to get home. They were kept out of their homes for 2-3 days by the roadblocks set up around the evacuation zone boundaries although some did argue their way through.

The 59% who decided to leave did so after they knew that chlorine gas was involved. The decision, at the time, did not appear to involve loss of work or additional expense because most people expected to return after visiting friends and relatives for the day. It was not a decision to evacuate for several days although that is what it turned out to be.

FIGURE 5.11 VOLUNTARY EVACUATION ALONG THE NORTHERN PERIMETER OF THE EVACUATION ZONE



The reasons given by the people who left were mainly related to their concern about the risks (Table 5.15). In addition, 14% of those living just beyond the evacuation zone thought they had been told to go. These two perceptions are linked to the proximity of the accident (people were not reassured about the "safe" wind direction) and the evacuation of the Square One Shopping Centre north of Burnhamthorpe Road.

On the other hand, people who decided to stay, largely did so because they knew that they were not told to evacuate (53%) and not because they believed that there was no risk (14%) (Table 5.15).

Table 5.15. Reasons given by perimeter people north of Burnhamthorpe Road, who did, and did not, evacuate

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| (a) <u>did evacuate because:</u> | <u>percent</u> |
| Worried in case of danger | 34 |
| Believed they were told to go | 14 |
| Because near evacuation zone | 11 |
| Saw others go | 9 |
| Concern about pregnancy/children | 8 |
| Concern about health | 6 |
| Other reasons | <u>18</u> |
| N = 126 | 100% |
| (b) <u>did not evacuate because:</u> | |
| Not asked to evacuate | 53 |
| Not at risk | 14 |
| News reassuring | 10 |
| Have no children | 3 |
| Housing evacuees | 3 |
| Nowhere to go | 2 |
| Other reasons | <u>17</u> |
| N = 74 | 100% |

5.9. ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
IN THE PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE EMERGENCY

5.9.1. Information characteristics of the emergency
situation

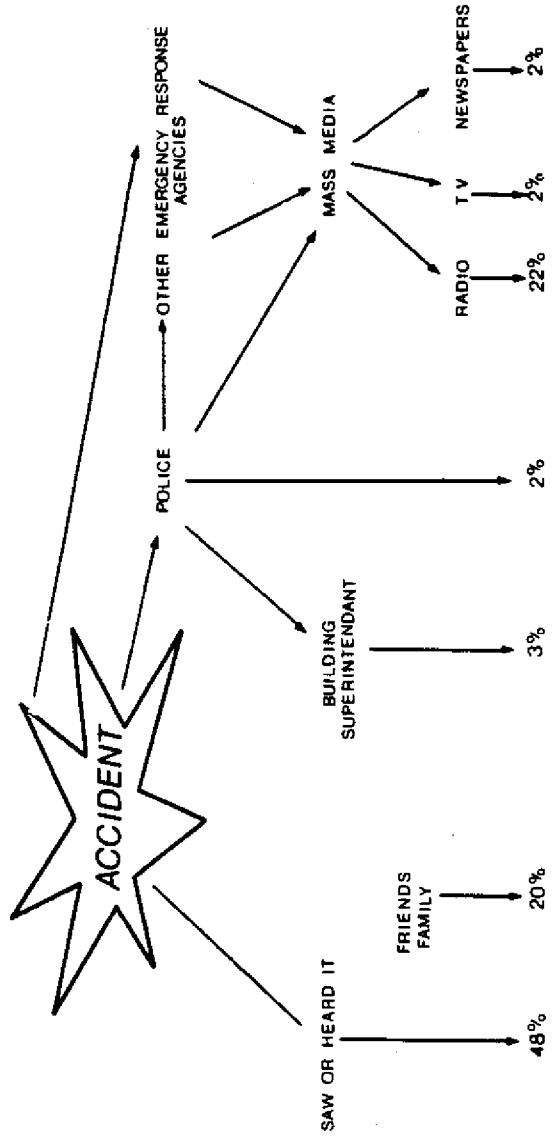
The derailment at Mavis Road announced itself to thousands of Mississaugans. Fifty percent of the 75,500 households which would be evacuated and many others heard or saw the accident and were immediately aware that something was amiss. At first, most people perceived only the danger from explosions and fire, and were unaware that any gases such as chlorine were involved. They did not know that it was a derailment, but simply that it was in their neighbourhood. Many thought that an industrial plant was involved.

Of the remaining 37,750 households, the majority (32,400) learnt about the accident the following morning. Only 6% of all households did not know about the derailment 12 hours after it had happened.

Of the people who did not see or hear the accident, most (43%) learnt about it the next day on their radios. Others (24%) heard about it from another member of their family. Another 10% were surprised to hear about the accident when they were asked by police, or by their apartment building superintendent, to leave between 02.00 and 08.00 hours early on Sunday morning.

Figure 5.12 illustrates the information flow pattern through which the public learnt about the accident. It shows that the information setting for the evacuation was a very favourable one with only one or two communication links came between the source (accident) and half of the public, and almost 50% of the public witnessed the explosions and/or fires for themselves.

FIGURE 5.12 INFORMATION CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH MISSISSAUGA PUBLIC LEARNT ABOUT THE ACCIDENT



In addition:

- (a) 94% of the public knew about the accident within 12 hours;
- (b) the accident was dramatic and looked dangerous;
- (c) people had heard of chlorine and knew that it was a 'poison gas'.

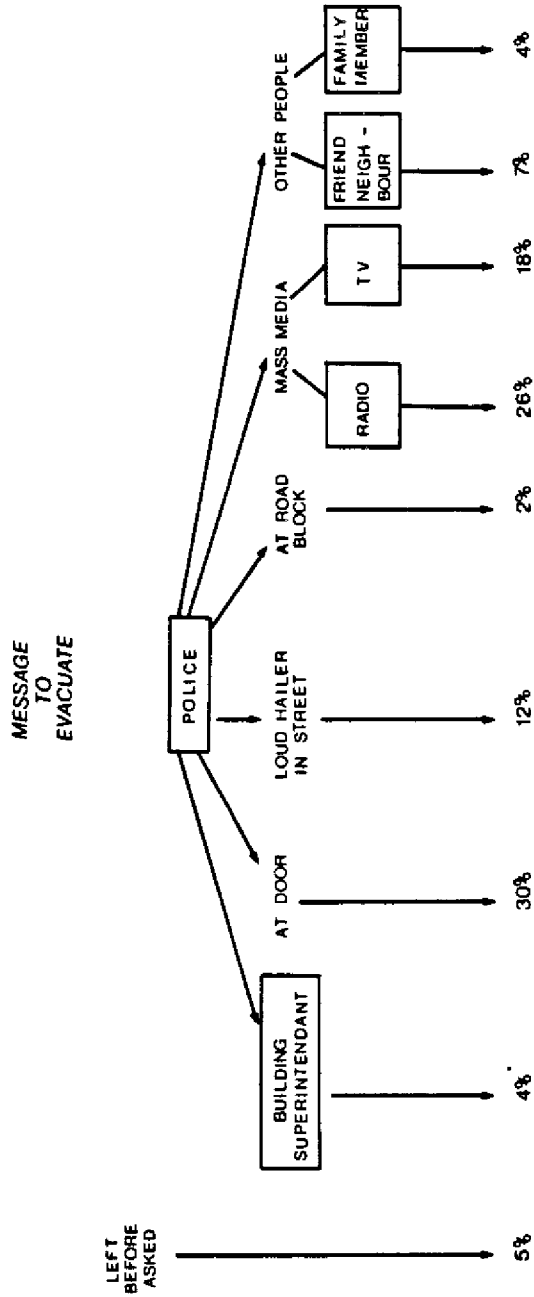
In general, the residents of Mississauga did not need to be persuaded that there was good reason why they should evacuate their homes. The information about the derailment was spread among them rapidly and accurately. Rumour had little chance to develop except one short-lived rumour on Sunday morning that the train had carried PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls - a carcinogen).

5.9.2. The message to evacuate

Figure 5.13 illustrates the information channels through which Mississauga residents learnt about the order to evacuate. Usually only one or two links were involved: the police interacting directly with the public (43%); or the police message relayed through radio (26%) and television (18%). When people heard the message directly from the police at their door or by a loud hailer they perceived the danger as immediate and left quickly. When they heard the news on the radio or television, or when they were contacted by friends and neighbours, many sought to confirm the message by checking it through another channel. They would check friends' reports against the media or would try to telephone someone in charge; they would cross-check TV reports with radio. As the messages coincided, the public was left with little doubt, and left their homes.

The public was also encouraged to leave by seeing neighbours leave, and the presence of police roadblocks helped to convince them that the situation was a serious one. Thus conditions favouring a rapid and uniform public response

FIGURE 5.13 INFORMATION CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH MISSISSAUGA PUBLIC LEARNT ABOUT THE ORDER TO EVACUATE



to an evacuation order were present: few intervening links, consistency of message between channels, and the availability to the public of alternative channels to allow them to cross-check information.

5.9.3. Private Communications prior to evacuation

Almost all households in Mississauga had their own telephone and every household had nearby access to one. Telephones formed a vital link between evacuees and their friends and relatives. The survey results and follow-up interviews indicate that between the time of the accident and when the families left their homes, there were several telephone calls made to and from each household.

Outgoing and incoming telephone calls were made:

- (a) to pass reassurance that the family was well, and to exchange news,
- (b) to arrange emergency accommodation with friends and relatives,
- (c) to seek more information about the accident and about what to do.

The control sample in Don Mills were asked about their attempts to contact people inside the evacuation zone. Forty percent said that they had friends in Mississauga. Of those with friends, 43% tried to contact the evacuees they knew when they heard about the emergency. Most of these contacts (85%) were by phone from outside to inside the evacuation zone. Only 3% were phone calls initiated from the other direction. It can therefore be hypothesized that attempts to phone each household in Mississauga were made by a third to half of their friends within the Metro Toronto area. For 75,500 households, the total number of private incoming calls alone must have been enormous.

Calls by evacuees to authorities or to voluntary agencies to seek further information, advice or reassurance were the least successful. Evacuees report that they often could not get through, and when they did the person on the other end of the line did not help them very much. This problem relates both to the overburdening of some lines (and people) and to the types of information requested—some people wanted to know before their evacuation zone was officially declared whether they would be evacuated; others wanted to know whether buses would be available; relations wanted to know where individual people had gone. At the time there was insufficient information available anywhere to answer these requests.

5.9.4. Information during the evacuation

Once evacuation had been announced and while people were away from their homes, their information needs centred around seven topics:

- what was happening at the accident site;
- the amount of danger;
- when they might be evacuated;
- when they could return;
- what had happened to people they were concerned about;
- the welfare of their pets, especially those left behind in the empty homes;
- the security of their property.

Table 5.16 indicates how far all evacuees, and those using the Centres, felt that these needs had been met. There are some significant differences between the two groups.

Evacuees, as a whole, were most satisfied with the information they received about what was happening at the

The search for information.....

Mr. and Mrs. F. are both graduates with professional careers. They have one small child. The family live near the outer edge of the evacuated area.

When they first heard that their area might be evacuated, they called the police and were told to leave immediately (Sunday afternoon). They were not given any further details, and did not ask for any.

They were allowed back to their home on Wednesday but felt on alert, awaiting a call to re-evacuate. Mrs. F. phoned the police for advice but could not get through. She was concerned that radio reports were not up-to-date. A little later, she tried the Fire Department and got through. She asked what she should do in the event of a gas explosion for herself and her baby. She remembers that they said, twice, "Lady, there's nothing you can do".

This reply frightened her and she ran around packing things again. On the radio, she heard Mr. McMurtry and Mayor McCallion discussing the possibility of a chlorine gas release. They wouldn't be talking about it unless it was a real possibility. But no one could tell her, if there was a bus to take her out in a hurry, or how to protect her baby. She was scared that she did not know what she should do if something went wrong. She desperately needed more information.

"If I live to be 200", Mrs. F. remembers thinking, "I'll never forget this anxiety".

Table 5.16. Evaluation of Information available to them during the emergency by all evacuees and those in evacuation centres

| Did not have enough information about: | All evacuees (N=504) | Those in evacuation centres (N=175) |
|--|-------------------------|--|
| | % | % |
| What was happening | 21 | 39 |
| Amount of danger | 36 | 47 |
| When you might be evacuated | 41 | 54 |
| When you could return | 58 | 28 |
| People you were concerned about | 28 | 46 |
| Your pets left behind | 47 | 57 |
| The security of your property | 42 | 49 |

site, and about the welfare of family and friends. This reflects detailed and accurate media reports on the accident scene, and the fact that families were generally evacuated together. They were less satisfied with the information available to them about what was happening at their homes with regard to their pets and property security (over 40% felt that they did not have enough information).

The area where most evacuees would have liked more information related to their own travel arrangements--when to move out of the area and when they could return; nearly 60% of all evacuees were dissatisfied with information about when they might be able to return.

Evacuees staying in the Evacuation Centres had different information problems. Fewer of them felt that they knew enough about what was happening at the accident site and about the degree of risk. They were also less satisfied with the information they had about missing relatives and about their pets. More of the people in the evacuation centres, however, felt that they were well informed about when they could return.

The differences in the degree to which evacuees' information needs were satisfied are what might be expected from their different situations: evacuees staying with friends and relatives in private homes not only had access to radio and television news but could easily use private telephones to contact other people whereas for people in the centres, telephones were more difficult to find. Evacuees in private homes, however, had to organize their own transportation to their temporary shelters and wanted accurate and rapid information about when evacuation zones would be closed and opened. In contrast, people in the main evacuation centres were relatively close to home and some received

direct announcements about the re-entry zones, as well as hearing through the news media. Overall, the evacuees who were staying in private homes and in hotels came closest to having their information needs fulfilled.

During the evacuation, evacuees believed that they received the most accurate information from radio and television. The most frequently mentioned radio station was CFRB (specified by 11% of evacuees); the most mentioned television station was the community service, Channel 10, (mentioned by 10% of evacuees). More people felt that radio was the most reliable medium for up to date and accurate news reports (65% compared to 33% for television). Newspapers were relied upon by only 2% of the evacuees. This reflects the public need for up-to-the-minute information, which radio provided, and the fact that they could keep tuned to a radio all day with less interference to their daily activities than with a television. Some people complained of the repetitiveness of television news programming, particularly the constant re-runs of early film of the accident. Radio was most used by people wanting to know when and how to return to their homes.

5.9.5. Public evaluation of information

In retrospect, more evacuees felt that they were getting the real story during the emergency, than did not (Table 5.17). However a third of the sample asked were not so sure. People living outside the evacuation zone were more likely than the evacuees to believe that they had received the real story. Evacuees in the Centres were the group least likely to have believed all they were told.

Table 5.17. Responses to question:
"Did you feel that you were getting the real
story during the emergency?"

| | Yes | No | Not Sure |
|-----------------------------|-----|----|----------|
| | % | % | % |
| All evacuees (N=504) | 55 | 16 | 28 |
| Those in centres (N=175) | 44 | 25 | 31 |
| People on perimeter (N=200) | 63 | 19 | 18 |
| Control group (N=200) | 68 | 16 | 16 |

As has been discussed elsewhere in this report, a major information problem for the evacuees was the lack of any warning or advice to be prepared for a stay away longer than a few hours. Most evacuees had time to prepare for overnight or longer stays away but did not realize that it might be necessary.

In the surveys the evacuees were asked specifically if, knowing that the length of the evacuation could not be predicted, they felt that they should have been warned of the possibility that it would last for several days. The response was overwhelmingly 'yes'. Nearly 90% of all evacuees and those using Evacuation Centres felt that despite the uncertainty they should have been warned. Such advice, they felt, would have reduced the numbers who left without enough clothes, medication and other supplies, and who thereby suffered additional inconvenience and anxiety.