

First-ever conviction of water theft in King

A Whitchurch-Stouffville company, Ontario Hydro Vac, pleaded guilty in a Newmarket courtroom last week to illegally taking water from a King Township hydrant late last year.

It's the first time King has pursued a case of water theft through the courts.

"We take the issue of water theft extremely seriously," said Kathryn Moyle, Township Clerk and Director of Clerks and Bylaw. "It poses a serious health and safety risk and costs the municipality lost revenue."

King Township staff noticed someone illegally hooked up to a hydrant on Melrose Avenue in King City on Oct. 29, 2015. They took a picture of the hookup, including the truck being used. That enabled bylaw officers to investigate and eventually lay a charge of using a municipal hydrant without a permit.

The fine upon conviction can range from \$100 to \$50,000. The company's representative pleaded guilty in a Newmarket court last week and was given a \$500 fine.

When someone hooks up illegally to a fire hydrant there are several negative things that can happen, said John Vandenberg, King Township's water and wastewater compliance engineering technologist.

Potential negative impacts to water system:

? Contamination of the drinking water through pressure reduction or a back siphonage event.

? Failure of hydrant(s) in fire situations due to damage caused by unauthorized access. When the Township provides hydrant permits the fire department is notified and operations staff monitor and ensure hydrant operability after the permit is removed.

? Overall damage to municipal water infrastructure through improper operation of the hydrant.

? Cost to the municipality due to lost revenue from the stolen water.

King is asking people to contact the municipality if they see suspicious activity around fire hydrants. While King does issue hydrant hookup permits, it's better to err on the side of caution and call 905-833-4002 or email bylaw@king.ca if you witness suspicious behaviour. Also, if it's safe to do so, take a photo of the activity. This can help secure a conviction.