

CHEYENNE APARTMENTS

Health unit, London to pursue landlord for gas bill

Meanwhile, city council agrees to apply for private legislation to get a bylaw that would allow the city to direct rent from tenants to pay any landlord's utility bill.

By **Dahlia Reich**
The London Free Press

The city and the Middlesex-London district health unit will aggressively go after landlord Elijah Elieff for an unpaid gas bill of more than \$5,000. The gas was turned off at Elieff's Cheyenne Avenue apartment buildings Monday morning because of the outstanding bill, but Union Gas Ltd. was issued a directive from the health unit to turn it back on.

Heat was restored within 45 minutes, leaving the health unit with Elieff's tab.

"When the gas is formally turned off, I can declare a hazard to health and direct that the services be reconnected," said Doug Pudden, medical officer of health. "The (health unit's) board of health is in a position to get the bill paid and go from there."

Pudden said the city has set aside money to enable the health unit to pay the bill.

"There's an understanding the city would make a budget item available for this one-time issue," said Pudden, who warned that the Cheyenne problem is far from solved.

"It's not something the health unit does on a regular basis."

STEPS TAKEN: City administrator John Fleming said "all possible legal steps" will be taken to recover the money from Elieff.

The health unit must give Elieff 60 days before such legal action is taken, Pudden said.

Community outreach worker Susan Eagle said she's pleased the city and health unit took action so quickly. "I appreciate how seriously the city has

responded."

A RELIEF: Eagle said the move by the city and health unit is a relief for the tenants, yet they continue to live with uncertainty. "It's not the end because it hasn't been resolved."

The problem, she said, heightens the need for a bylaw allowing the city to direct rent from tenants to pay a landlord's outstanding utility bill and then go after the landlord for the money.

With such a bylaw, the Cheyenne problem wouldn't have escalated to the point where gas was shut off.

On Monday, the city came a step closer to getting such a bylaw. Council agreed to apply for private legislation needed to put a bylaw in place.

LATEST DISPUTE: The unpaid gas bill is the latest dispute in the tenants' battle with Elieff, one that has been going on for years. There have been sewage and cockroach problems at the buildings and, in addition to the gas bill, Elieff hasn't paid a

hydro bill of more than \$13,000.

Many tenants are paying rent into a trust fund rather than to Elieff and are going through the courts to have the fund directed to pay the hydro bill. The London Hydro-Electric Commission (formerly the public utilities commission) has agreed not to cut off power while the courts consider the request.

In a related Cheyenne development, Elieff's sandwich shop, Richmond Subs, has closed. Elieff's wife, who wouldn't give her name, said negative publicity about the apartment buildings resulted in a drop in business. "It made lots of problems. Made no money."

SHOP PICKETED: In support of the Cheyenne tenants, the sub shop had, until recently, been picketed once a week for several weeks by members of the Limberlost Tenants Association.

Elieff's wife said Elieff hasn't paid the hydro or gas bills because he has no money.