

# Library told to end DVD, CD 'insurance'

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## CAMBRIDGE

Ontario law says public libraries aren't supposed to charge anyone to borrow items from their shelves, but a movie or music disc costs you 50 cents at the Cambridge library.

Provincial library officials are stumped about how to bring the Cambridge library to heel.

"We're not aware of any situation like this ever happening before," said Sarah Petrean, spokesperson for the Ontario Culture ministry.

"This is a new situation for us . . . we're not really sure what we will do."

Cambridge has charged an "insurance fee" on all movies and music recordings for three decades, ever since the library board decided to expand its collection beyond books to vinyl music albums, then cassettes, video tapes to today's CDs and DVDs.

Chief librarian Greg Hayton defends the library's mandatory fee for DVDs and CDs, saying it falls into a grey area in the libraries act. "We charge an insurance fee. We don't charge to loan it. It's a bit of semantics, I have to admit," Hayton said.

"The act does not specifically address it . . . that's our position."

Of the \$65,000 the library expects to collect this year from video and music loans, much will go directly to beef up "probably the best DVD collection around," Hayton said. The rest of the money is used to replace damaged DVDs or CDs. It's difficult to blame individuals for

damage, so the library decided its more fair to pool the repair costs for all patrons borrowing them.

The ban on borrowing fees is a black-and-white issue for Ontario's culture ministry, Petrevan said.

"Videos, DVDs and CDs belong to a prescribed class of circulating materials under the Public Libraries Act and must be lent out without a mandatory fee," she said.

"Purely voluntary insurance coverage" may be offered but "no coercion can be placed upon the library user to accept insurance as a condition of borrowing DVDs or videocassettes."

Hayton said "that's their interpretation" and has no plans to make changes to the required fees at the city's four library branches. Nor is he concerned about ministry throwing the book at him.

"I don't know if there are any library police," he said.

"You're right, there is no such thing as library police," Petrevan said. The ministry has sent an email restating the rules. A letter will follow this week.

The province gives about \$120,000 in grants to the Cambridge library system each year.

The library's proposed 2009 budget is \$4.6 million, which is almost entirely funded by Cambridge city council. Council has no say over how the independent library board operates; it's governed by the libraries act.

Cambridge stands alone in Waterloo Region by charging an insurance fee. It also has the shortest borrowing time for popular videos: one day. Other local libraries give a week, sometimes three, before overdue fines start to accumulate.

Hayton said a review of all video borrowing policies is underway, but said it started before The Record asked about its insurance fee.

"Kitchener Public Library does not charge (video insurance) fees . . . there would be a bill if it was damaged," said Ann Wood, public services manager.

The City of Waterloo Public Library doesn't charge any fees to borrow a video or music recording. Nor is there an insurance fee at the 10 rural library branches across North Dumfries, Wilmot, Wellesley and Woolwich townships.

"Not unless you're late," said Kae Elgie, information manager for the Waterloo Region library system. "We don't charge a variety of fines. I know, in ways, we deprive ourselves of revenue."

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