

Worker enjoys tea waiting for rescue - Rising flood waters strand backhoe

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A sudden downpour stranded a construction worker on the roof of his backhoe as rising **flood** waters from the **Red Hill** Creek threatened to sweep him over Albion Falls.

Hamilton fire crews responded to a call just before 1 p.m. yesterday at an excavation site at Mountain Brow Blvd. and Arbour Road. They found the man looking calm and drinking tea from a Thermos atop a \$350,000 Caterpillar backhoe in the middle of the pond as rushing water rose steadily around him.

"I realized I was in trouble when the motor quit," said Albert Kennedy, 59, a heavy-machine operator with O'Connell Construction.

"I thought, 'Oh well, I'm stuck.' So I had a cup of tea on the roof and waited to be rescued," he said.

Kennedy had been removing dirt and rocks from the dry creek bed and loading debris onto a truck when heavy rains hit, stranding him in the backhoe and in danger of being swept by the fast moving water over the 40-metre high falls and onto the rocks below. He was about 15 metres from the falls.

Firefighters feared more rain threatened to cause water levels to rise farther and crews strung a rope across the pond to keep the man from being swept towards the falls.

Crews attached a life jacket to a rope and towed it to the man along the banks of the pond. Officers with the Hamilton police marine unit arrived about an hour after the call and used an inflatable raft to reach Kennedy and bring him back to shore.

Co-worker John Amaral said Kennedy was at the mouth of the creek and was on his way back to the edge of the pond, when water poured into the backhoe's engine and the motor stalled.

He said the water was moving too fast for the man to safely make his way to the edge of the pond and Kennedy had no choice but to get on top of the cabin.

A mid-day storm slammed into Hamilton and the surrounding area, flooding Steel Town with up to 14 millimetres of water before heading off to the east, said Environment Canada.

Witnesses said it took about half an hour for the backhoe to nearly disappear in five metres of muddy water as construction workers watched helplessly from the banks of the pond.

Later, Hamilton fire Captain Randy Newstead said the water was about 10 centimetres from the top of the cabin when crews arrived.

"If the water had kept rising, he would have been in serious danger but the rain gave us a break too and the water started to recede," Newstead said.

Ironically, O'Connell Construction was hired to widen the pond and rebuild a bridge above Albion Falls as part of a new storm water management system to prevent flash flooding of the **Red Hill** Creek. Runoff from heavy rain enters the **Red Hill** Creek, causing it to **flood** over the falls and erode the creek bed below.

Kennedy was a little shaken and slightly embarrassed by all the attention but grateful to be off the backhoe.

"It's a shame that machine is under there," he said before heading off to a nearby trailer to warm up.

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