

Joe Volpe Disturbed by Pearson Fuel Flap

By KWOK WONG, SUN MEDIA

When MP Joe Volpe found out about jet fuel tankers flipping over at Pearson, he immediately thought of the explosion at Sunrise Propane that jolted him awake.

That six jet fuel tankers have flipped at Pearson in the last 10 years is a "very disturbing piece of information, especially given the Sunrise Propane explosion," the Liberal transportation critic said.

Volpe was awakened by the first blast at the propane plant a kilometre from his home.

"I went outside and saw the second explosion -- to imagine that that would happen on federally regulated land, like the airport, where you have passengers, is just unconscionable," he said.

The union representing workers at Consolidated Aviation said in a Sunday Sun exclusive that licensing standards at Pearson allow a person with a basic car driver's licence to get behind the wheel of a tanker filled with jet fuel -- a practice they say is partly responsible for six "tanker flips" in a decade.

To drive the same type of truck on Ontario's highways, truckers need a special-class licence with an endorsement for using air brakes.

But since the airport is on private property, provincial licensing rules don't apply to vehicles on its grounds.

"They're not provincially plated vehicles -- therefore those drivers don't require the provincial licence that they would if they were driving off-airport," said Trish Krale, media co-ordinator for the GTAA.

"It doesn't matter whether the airport is on private property or not," Volpe said, "it doesn't diminish the need to provide safety and security to the travelling public."

Like the GTAA, the Vancouver International Airport Authority is also responsible for certifying its workers but "our requirement is that you have a licence appropriate for the type of equipment that you'll be operating," said Brett Patterson, director of operations safety and planning. Their last tanker accident occurred 10 years ago, he said.

Gurbax Malhi, Liberal MP for Bramalea-Gore-Malton, the riding encompassing Pearson, said that the provincial licensing rules should be "the same for everybody," regardless if it is private property or not.

"Priority should be safety" and will be if Liberals come to power, he said.