

Dead animals litter Outaouais farm after barn fire

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A west Quebec family say they're worried about toxins and wild predators after a fire left their yard littered with dead livestock — and they don't know when it can be cleaned up.

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Julie Kent, Tom Townsend and their two daughters crouch near the site of a barn fire in Low, Que., that killed their livestock on Sept. 4, 2017. (Trevor Pritchard/CBC)

A west Quebec family say they're worried about toxins and wild predators after a barn fire left their yard littered with dead livestock — and they don't know when it can be cleaned up.

The fire broke out early Monday morning outside Tom Townsend and Julie Kent's barn on chemin McDonald, a winding tree-lined rural road near Low, Que., about 45 minutes north of Ottawa.

Townsend said he was half-asleep on the couch when he heard a loud bang at about 4 a.m.

He rushed outside to find flames soaring from his barn up to the tops of the nearby trees, he said. Calling 911, he grabbed a nearby hose to try to douse the flames as firefighters rushed to the remote property.

"Everything was gone," he said in an interview Monday afternoon. "It was just the [barn] frame left that was on fire by the time I got out here."

Once the fire died down, the family assessed the damage and found the remains of all their livestock — eight chickens, two guinea fowl, a goat, as well as their older daughter's pet rabbit — in the blaze.



Eight chickens, two guinea fowl, one goat and a pet rabbit were killed after a fire broke out overnight on Sept. 4, 2017., on the Low, Que., farm of Tom Townsend and Julie Kent. (Tom Townsend)

The charred bodies of the animals — along with melted tires, singed wood, pieces of the barn and other detritus — were still on the property Monday afternoon.

They tried to get direction from their insurer, Intact Insurance, Monday morning. But when they called the emergency line, Townsend said they were simply told an adjuster would assess the damage during the workweek.

“ I tried to explain that the fire didn't care if it was a holiday or not.” - *Tom Townsend*

"I tried to explain that the fire didn't care if it was a holiday or not," Townsend said.

"I feel there's a lot to clean up here. There's a lot of safety and hazard issues for my little ones, my two dogs. And they're just negating to do anything about it until it's appropriate for them, until it's convenient for them."

They're hesitant to remove the carcasses because they're not sure how that might affect any future insurance payout they're eligible for.

When contacted, the municipality told Townsend to speak to the insurance company first, he added.

Could attract 'unwanted visitors'

In addition to the lost livestock, Kent and Townsend also have dogs and cats living with them, their new baby and five-year-old daughter.

"She's very curious. She's not going to listen, and she's going to walk through all the nails and the toxins," said Kent about her oldest daughter, Gracie.

"I just want it to be cleaned up."

There's also the worry that the dead animals could attract coyotes, wolves and other predators, Townsend said.

"We're going to bring in unwanted visitors," he said. "There are bears — I have a game camera over on a trail over there, not 500 feet from here, that picks up bears — which is the last thing we need with a little one and dogs around here."



Julie Kent holds her infant daughter Kentley as she surveys the damage caused by an early morning barn fire at her farm in Low, Que. (Trevor Pritchard/CBC)

Insurer apologizes

The fire also destroyed expensive saws and other tools Townsend uses for his yard maintenance business, bringing the total damage up to about \$6,000.

After CBC News reached out to Intact Insurance, a spokesperson said they would be contacting the family to find out more about what happened.

The company also apologized for the family's "unpleasant experience" and for not meeting their expectations.

