

No Insurance On 200 Vehicles Burned In Cornwallis

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Glen Kirby

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Vehicles worth an estimated \$200,000 destroyed Monday in a farmyard fire in the Rural Municipality of Cornwallis - including classic autos from the 1950s - were not insured, according to the owner.

"I'm sick to my stomach," says Joe Ksiazek. "This only happens to stupid people who don't know what they are doing. So, apparently, I'm not as smart as I thought I was."

Ksiazek says he accidentally started the fire while attempting to repair a motor-home. The engine backfired after he poured gasoline into the open carburetor, igniting the dashboard.

"I tried to put the fire out with my glove and a rag and it didn't work. Within two minutes, the whole motor-home was in flames," says Ksiazek.

Unable to reach 9-1-1 on his cell phone, Ksiazek attempted to keep the flames from spreading. Thirty minutes later, when a neighbour spotted the smoke and came around to investigate, the wind had pushed the fire into Ksiazek's collection of 700 cars and trucks.

"Forty years ago, I bought a couple to fix and sell and I just couldn't stop buying them," he explains.

"There were some nice vehicles that got burned. The ones I'm going to miss are the two door, 1955 and '56 Chevys and Pontiacs."

Emergency crews arrived on the scene within an hour of the fire starting but at least 200 cars were consumed in the blaze. Ksiazek says 10,000 wooden pallets and materials for a 40-foot by 80-foot shed were also destroyed. *See photos from the fire [here](#).*

"There was no insurance," says Ksiazek, explaining the cost for insurance was often higher than the insurable value offered by Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI). "What are they worth? To me, they might be worth \$1,000 apiece in parts. To somebody else, they may only be worth \$50 apiece in parts."

Ksiazek estimates he lost \$200,000 worth of vehicles in Monday's blaze, plus another \$15,000 in other materials.

Explosions could be heard through the afternoon as overheated car tires burst. A house, shop and shed on the property - also uninsured - were not damaged.

"The house didn't go up in flames. I'm really glad about that. The shop and storage shed are also still standing," he says.

Fire crews stayed at the fire scene for more than 15-hours. Tuesday afternoon, Ksiazek was surveying the damage, pumping water onto hot spots and figuring out his next move.

"I think I can get maybe \$10,000 or \$15,000 in scrap for the burned vehicles," he says. "But I still got a few toys to play with. My '79 Trans-Am is OK."