

## **Gays vent anger over bathhouse inspection**

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Angry members of Hamilton's gay community lashed out at public officials last night, saying an inspection of a bathhouse made them feel violated and unsafe.

Two men were charged with indecent acts at the Warehouse Spa and Bath on Main Street West, after the multi-agency task force performed a routine inspection Tuesday.

Officials said the inspection was based on complaints, but it incensed members of the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender community, and resulted in yesterday's meeting with representatives from the task force. The team is comprised of police, the fire department, health inspectors and city building and licensing officers, among others.

In total, 14 establishments were inspected that night, uncovering 91 infractions and three criminal charges.

The other places inspected were the Skyline Bar and Billiards on Main Street West, Leaf's Sports Bar and Grill on Main Street West and Nimmi's Restaurant on Queen Street South, The Windsor Hotel, Crossroads on Main Street East, Buddy's Restaurant on King Street East, Logans Restaurant on Queen Street North, Boomers on Paramount Drive, Polo's on Hess Street South, The Blue Angel on King Street East, Neuroholistic Hamilton Inc. on Upper Ottawa, Show World on King Street East and Venus Spa on Highway 8 in Stoney Creek.

Yesterday's meeting was meant to educate the community about the role of the task force, but it allowed many to voice concerns over how the entity operates.

"Our job is to try to hit what we believe are problematic (establishments) based on complaints one of the agencies has received," said Acting Detective Sergeant Dave Calvert of the Vice and Drug squad, adding that sometimes inspections are carried out based on information obtained by police.

Judy Downey, city co-ordinator of standards and licensing, said going in as a team is an effective way of enforcing rules regulated by different agencies.

But some said it was an intimidating tactic that allowed agencies to go fishing for violations they may not have known about.

Damien Dommer, co-owner of The Werx, an alternative lifestyles club on Hughson Street, took issue with a team of several officers -- nine people inspected the Warehouse -- entering a premises if a complaint only dealt with one agency.

"What is the purpose of en-masse raids in the city of Hamilton of businesses that are complying with your laws?" wondered Dommer out loud.

He said The Werx was once inspected by the task force, but he never knew what complaint brought the team to his door.

Deputy Police Chief Tom Marlor said business owners should be told about complaints against their premises, although the complainant would remain confidential.

Marlor also said the task force may go in for a specific infraction, but if other violations are found, charges have to be laid.

"We did not go (to the Warehouse) to charge men who were having sex, but when we found men who were having sex, we had to lay charges," he said.

"This is a regrettable incident (that) we've upset the community, but I can't say it won't happen again (if charges must be laid)."

Lyla Miklos, representing the GLBT advisory committee to the city, said many men have been told by police officers to use bathhouses as a safe space to express their sexuality. Inspections that result in criminal charges send mixed messages, she said.

Suzanne Foreman stood up and expressed concern with how the two men charged at the Warehouse were allegedly treated. Witnesses said the men were handcuffed, taken into a locker room and told to change in front of female members of the task force.

A health inspection officer says the men were handcuffed, but were treated fairly.

"There were no females around when those individuals were undressing," he said.