

## Hurricane Sandy: Halloween may take a hit

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Nailed to wooden planks and covered in painter's plastic, Barb Gordon's outdoor decorations — including massive Harry Potter and Michael Jackson paintings — have weathered many a storm-drenched Halloween.

They've flapped through 70 km/h gusts, she said. So, despite a slew of municipal and provincial warnings on Monday about Superstorm Sandy's winds whipping decorations from front lawns, the lawyer is pooh-poohing the possible damage.

Strip the lawns and cancel Halloween? What a frightening thought.

"I think I'm just leaving things to fate," Gordon, a hobby painter, said of her annual neighbourhood display, installed over 12 lawns on Heddington Ave. in Forest Hill.

But with [Sandy](#) expected to hit Toronto by Tuesday, fate is not a concept that sits well with officials.

The City of Toronto and Emergency Management Ontario are encouraging residents to secure Halloween decorations as a safety recommendation.

Cancelling Halloween, which is not a public holiday, altogether is a trickier move — indeed, promoting physical safety at the expense of candy-induced sugar comas can be a hard sell to some trick-or-treaters.

But politicians have tried.

In 1976, then-Metropolitan Toronto chairman Paul Godfrey decreed Halloween fall on Oct. 30 because there would be an extra hour of sunlight before clocks were set back an hour the next day. A Toronto Star article quoted police noting fewer children were out trick-or-treating.

During the H1N1 flu outbreak in 2009, three Newfoundland and Labrador towns cancelled Halloween over rampant health concerns. The mayor of Mary's Harbour, population 417, signed a public notice explaining Halloween would be celebrated Nov. 6.

Last year, after the so-called [Halloween nor'easter](#) dumped record amounts of snow on the northeastern U.S., downing trees and telephone wires, several towns across New Jersey and Connecticut cancelled the holiday.

Bristol, Conn., Mayor Arthur Ward issued the order to dodge liability claims against the city in case someone stepped on a live wire, his executive assistant, Mary Suchopar, told the Star.

"People called the mayor's office and couldn't understand why Halloween would be cancelled," Suchopar said. "He had to put out the public safety announcement so people wouldn't sue the city."

But whether or not city officials have jurisdiction over the holiday — and if people even listen — remains a murky matter. A City of Toronto spokesperson called trick-or-treating an "informal neighbourhood activity" and a decision that ultimately rests with parents and their children.

Toronto police said they would not enforce a cancellation.



Barb Gordon is determined to leave up her Halloween decorations, even with Sandy bearing down.

KEITH BEATY/TORONTO STAR