

Firefighters' Cat Rescue Causes Controversy

Some Flint, Mich., residents question the fire department's rescue of a cat stuck in a tree.

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Ralphie the cat unwittingly started a controversy when he snuck out of his Burton, Mich., home and climbed a 50-foot tree, where he stayed for three days. When his owner, Melissa Robinson, called the Flint, Mich., Fire Department for help, the department rescued Ralphie from his perch. Residents weighed in with their opinions when The Flint Journal reported on the feline rescue.

Some critics called the rescue a waste of taxpayer money, The Flint Journal reports. "People have the right to be upset," Clarence D. Ellison told the newspaper. "Need to cut back on taxes, that's government, and the government does stupid things with taxes."

The Flint Fire Department defends the rescue of Ralphie, however, saying that the firefighters are on duty and paid no matter who — or what — they are rescuing.

"The firefighters were already working," said Bob Christenson, Flint Fire Battalion Chief. "We do set up equipment for training purposes during the day, and it was an opportunity for guys to go over it and do something that was comforting and beneficial."

Christenson said the department did not have any other calls at the time. "These (firefighters) were at work, not engaged in handling an emergency at the time," he said. "If an emergency came up, they would have left to handle it."

Other critics wonder why Ralphie's owner didn't call the Burton Fire Department instead of Flint's firefighters. Robinson explained that she lives on the border of Flint and Burton, and the Flint Fire Department is closer to her home. She also expressed surprise that people found fault with Ralphie's rescue.

"I've lived in this area my whole life, and I pay taxes, too," Robinson said. "I do understand the concern, I certainly would not have wanted (the department) to help me if they had more pressing concerns."