



Walter Passarella / Metroland

WHITBY-- Joel Gardner, Environmental Manager for GerdauAmeristeel Recycling stands where the expansion of the current landfill will take place. July 20,2007

Mountains or just molehills?

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By Lesley Bovie

WHITBY -- To anyone else, they look like rolling green hills.

But the valley of landfill berms behind Gerdau Ameristeel Recycling are the resting grounds for about 500 tonnes of "fluff" generated each day by the mini steel mill's recycling operation.

Looking to the year 2010, when the berms will have reached their capacity, Gerdau's recycling division has initiated a study under the Environmental Assessment Act to increase the landfill site by another 1.5 million metric tonnes, in effect doubling its size.

For Gerdau, it's more affordable and reliable than shipping its waste to other landfill sites, which are drying up in Canada and the United States, says environmental manager Joel Gardner.

"The other part of the (Environmental Assessment) is that we want to be able to get back into our berms and recover materials," he explains. "As those technologies and markets emerge to become more affordable, it means we could be generating less byproduct."

As the second largest recycler in North America, Gerdau produces steel by recycling end-of-life vehicles and other metal products supplied by scrap yards. A large shredder shreds vehicles into small pieces, separating out metal that is sent to the mini steel mill for recycling.

The remaining automobile shredder residue (ASR) or "fluff" is piled into berms behind the recycling operation.

After 15 years of regular monitoring for leachate, Mr. Gardner says testing of the berms have always fallen within ministry standards and are reported annually to a berm liaison committee made up of concerned citizens and various government agencies.

He and Gerdau's environmental consultants have spent the last few weeks visiting area industry gathering input as the company prepares terms of reference for the study. Later this month, they hope to target the 20 or so homeowners living nearby in Thickson's Point, listening to their concerns during what he calls "kitchen table discussions."

Some public meetings are expected to take place later this summer.

"The businesses, I would say, their reaction has been neutral to positive," says Mr. Gardner, adding he understands residents may have concerns about big industry in their neighbourhood.

But Pat Dooley, a member of the Corridor Area Ratepayers Association who sits on the liaison committee, fears the steel maker is creating a fire hazard.

"They're stockpiling flammable material in the middle of a populated area," he says. "And the part that scares me is they want to go back and open these things up."

The landfill berm was the site of a fire in 2000, thought to have been caused by a hot piece of metal within the fluff. Since then, fluff is staged for 24 hours to allow it to cool, said Mr. Gardner.

"ASR is not a highly flammable product. It is not classified as flammable at all," he said, adding Gerdau is in the middle of updating its emergency response plan.

Berm design also includes fire walls and flame detectors that are mounted on active cells, he explained.

Town planning staff, who also sit on the berm liaison committee, said in a report to councillors this month the department will continue to monitor the EA process and advise Whitby council accordingly.

Mr. Gardner adds he's researching ways to bail and stockpile fluff to maximize space in future berms. Should more technologies develop in the future to make thermal recovery affordable, that could also help expand capacity.

"Obviously, the more we're able to draw out of our yield, the cheaper it is for us," he explained.

Related

Building a berm

- fluff is staged for 24 hours to allow it to cool
- it is then piled into berms
- the sides of the berm are capped with clay and soil to prevent leachate
- when a berm reaches 100 feet it is capped with clay and soil, and hydro-seeded.
- Co-Steel Lasco applied for the original EA establishing the landfill berm in the early 1990s.
- Gerdau Ameristeel, an international company based in Brazil, merged with Co-Steel Lasco in 2002.
- Whitby is one of 17 recycling facilities and has a capacity of 3,000 tonnes per day. Along with the mini steel mill, it employs 500 people.