

Clarington residents blast bid for 'monster' trash incinerator

Locals grill experts about impact of proposed waste-to-energy's project on health, land values

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They're calling it "the monster."

And 200 anxious Clarington residents grilled a panel of experts for two hours last week over what threat a waste incinerator, the first proposed in the GTA in decades, might pose to their health and environment.

But most left the Bowmanville meeting barely reassured and no happier about the energy-from-waste facility that York and Durham regions want to build near their homes.

"I'm putting my house up for sale," said one woman, whose real estate agent warned her not to talk.

"I don't want to live beside that monster, breathing in all that toxic stuff," she said.

The forum was the first time the community has had a chance to discuss the preferred site recommended by project consultants.

Located between Courtice and Osbourne Rds., south of Highway 401, the 12-hectare site has several advantages over other spots on the short list. Among them: proximity to transfer stations, minimal impact on water quality and distance from residential areas.

But the panel failed to allay fears about emissions from the facility and accompanying truck traffic.

"I don't feel any better about it," said Kristin Robinson, after asking for reassurance that hazardous materials won't be burned along with the trash. She was told that whether or not garbage was pre-sorted, "the emissions are about the same and contaminants are removed."

Robinson said she was so worried that she visited the Brampton incinerator, which has burned Peel Region garbage since 1992. "Everything that goes in the garbage is burned – batteries, paint, whatever Joe Blow puts out by the curb."

Courtice resident Dave Renaud wanted a guarantee cancer rates in the community wouldn't increase. Dr. Lesbia Smith said there shouldn't be an increased risk of more than "one in a million" – an answer Renaud called "vague" and unsatisfactory.

But the experts acknowledged unknowns. Site-specific studies are yet to be done and the technology won't be decided until next year.

Don MacKay of Bowmanville wasted no time at the microphone. "Who's against the incinerator?" he asked as most hands shot up.

"Everyone I know is against it. They're worried about the ash," he said later. "But it doesn't make any difference what we think; they're shoving it down our throats."

John Muto asked if the consultants had looked at the incinerator's effect on property values. They hadn't.

"It's all a charade," he said of the session. "It's a done deal."

But Durham's waste management director, Mirka Januskiewicz, said regional council won't make a decision until December. An opinion poll will be taken and comments can be sent until month's end to the website durhamyorkwaste.ca.

Another public forum will be held at 7 p.m. tomorrow at Faith United Church in Courtice.