

# GREAT LAKES NEWS

## Ontario garbage to go up in smoke

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**GREAT LAKES UNITED**

A drive to burn municipal garbage is catching fire in Ontario. Currently some of Ontario's largest municipalities are actively pursuing the option of building energy from waste incinerators (EFWs). These are commonly called waste to energy incinerators (WTE) in the U.S.

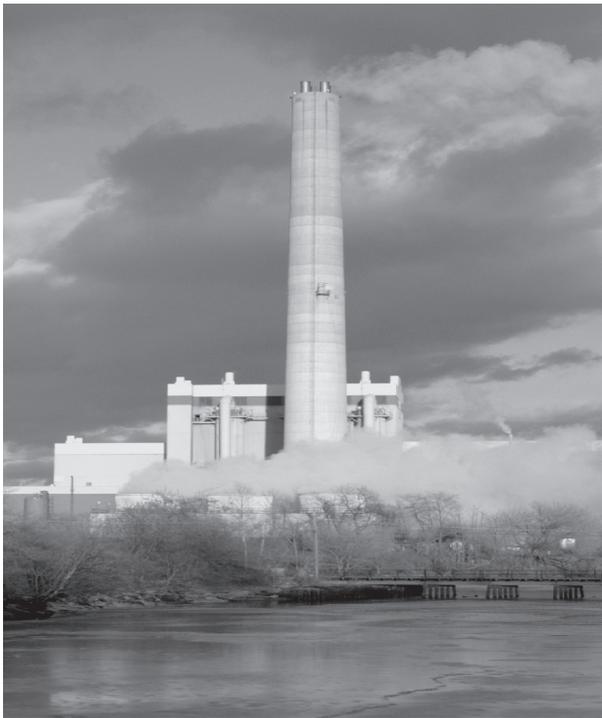
York and Durham regional municipal councils have already approved the construction of a shared incinerator. In March, they announced five candidate sites for this plant. Four of these proposed sites

are adjacent to the Darlington nuclear power plant on the shores of Lake Ontario.

Hamilton and Niagara region are also jointly considering such a facility. A year and a half ago they were poised to approve an incinerator, but determined pushing by local citizens' groups stalled the proposal. Instead, upon the urging of local activists, Hamilton and Niagara are assessing the potential for higher waste reduction and diversion rates, and the potential of pretreated, prestabilized waste going to landfill instead of building an incinerator.

Halton Region is discussing the possible construction of a gigantic 1.2 million tonnes per year incinerator. Halton Region dreams of profiting immensely by filling this monster incinerator with garbage from Toronto.

Fifteen years ago, the then New Democratic government of Ontario led the world by banning the construction of new municipal waste incinerators or the expansion of existing ones. Protection of the Great Lakes from toxic contaminants such as dioxins and furans and mercury was cited as a prime reason for this ban. Since that time, two of the



A waste to energy incinerator in Camden New Jersey. Similar projects are being proposed in Ontario

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three municipal waste incinerators in Ontario have closed.

In 1994, the new Conservative government lifted this ban, but incineration did not gain much traction in Ontario. The only activity was an expansion of the only remaining municipal waste incinerator – the one in Brampton serving Peel Region.

But, in the last few years, a vigorous campaign by some municipalities, the plastics industry, and some media has pushed incineration to the forefront. And the current Liberal government in Ontario has bought into this option. On March 23, the government weakened the environment assessment requirements for EFW incinerators to make it easy to get approvals for them. A week later, Premier McGuinty of Ontario said, “We need to develop these kinds of technologies [EFW incinerators] here.”

EFW incinerators are being touted as a solution to two crises at once – the energy crisis and the waste crisis.

This argument fails to recognize that burning garbage is a very inefficient way to generate energy. Indeed, it is more energy efficient to recycle a product than to generate power by burning it in an EFW incinerator. For example, recycling plastics conserves 10 to 26 times the energy generated by burning plastics. It is more appropriate to call them “waste of energy” incinerators than “energy from waste” incinerators.

Also the incineration “solution” to the waste

crisis is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of that crisis. The problem is not a lack of disposal capacity. In the past six months alone, the Ontario government has approved 45 million tonnes of new landfill capacity. The real waste crisis is one of excess waste generation and of pitifully low waste diversion rates. In 2004, only 22.5% of solid waste in Ontario was diverted from disposal and the per capita waste generation rate continues to grow.

The proponents of incinerators claim that the new breed of incinerator is not a problem polluter. But, the industry’s own data prove the contrary. Modern EFW incinerators emit mercury at a rate five times higher per unit of electricity generated than coal, and greenhouse gases at a rate substantially higher than coal-fired or natural gas-fired power plants. How ironic that the Ontario government has promised to close down Ontario’s coal-fired power plants to reduce mercury emissions, but at the same time is supporting municipal waste incinerators.

Citizen activists are organizing around Ontario to stop this misguided and dangerous push for incineration. They are urging the provincial and municipal governments to focus on waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting instead and to look at a different style of landfilling where only pretreated and stabilized materials are placed in landfill.

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## FIND OUT MORE



With its partner organizations, GLU has put together four factsheets on the issues around municipal waste incineration. These are available on our website at [www.glu.org](http://www.glu.org).