

Durham/York Residual Waste Study

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By Barry Bracken

It seems to me that time is passing very quickly and that there will soon be the need for some serious decision making to occur. This is my first foray into regional and local politics and to be truthful, I have concerns. In my eyes, there is a lack of debate and discussion amongst councillors. In general, information from consultants and staff, who are guiding the waste project, is accepted without question. Often the problem is a lack of information which some would refer to as a lack of transparency. The reason I keep coming back, and I assume this is the case with the other delegates, is to provide you with information that is not forthcoming from the consultants and staff and that we deem to be important in the decision making process. I never thought that this was the role I would have to play. We are putting in a huge amount of effort to try to provide you with unbiased, reliable, scientific information for you to consider.

Surely you have noticed that much of the information we have provided runs counter to that which comes from your consultants. You must recognize they have a vested interest in the incinerator business. They have been chosen to guide you through this EA process to bring some form of waste incinerator to Durham Region. Not only that, but once you have that incinerator, they will probably be happy to oversee the testing of the emissions and operations of such a facility. I just happened to find out recently that Genivar performs that service for Peel Region in their testing and evaluation of the Algonquin Power incinerator near Brampton. So they will not only help you get an incinerator, they can help you evaluate its performance as well. Hopefully that will not be the case here.

In my research I have yet to read anything that says incinerators are the way to deal with our waste problem. I am convinced that they produce serious adverse health effects. As reported on the www.durhamenvironmentwatch.org website the Irish Doctors Environmental Association report that “it does not make sense to burn the Earth’s resources; resources that we should not destroy, but instead, share with future generations”. That report goes on to say that “Incineration does not destroy municipal waste; on the contrary, it transforms it into emissions into the environment and converts household waste to hazardous waste”.

Is there a Plan B? Someone should ask that question because if there isn’t, there should be.

Speaking of alternatives, I would encourage you to read an article which appeared in a recent Fortune magazine. The title of the article is “The End of Garbage”. It describes the efforts being made in places like San Francisco, Boulder, Canberra Australia, etc. in working toward zero waste. It also talks about the efforts of companies like Wal-Mart,

Toyoto, Dell computers, Hewlett-Packard and others assuming more responsibility for waste and doing something about it. You can access that report at the web site mentioned previously.

It goes without saying how important this issue is. The residents of Durham expect you to do your homework and make certain you have satisfactorily answered all your questions. In the end, if there is uncertainty, apply the 'precautionary principle' and be on the safe side.

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