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## Opinion

### "Idiots in Europe"

I guess my relatives over in The Netherlands are pretty stupid. When I visited family there last summer, I asked a lot of questions about their Waste-to-Energy (WTE) facilities. No one that I spoke to seemed to have any problem with it all. Surprisingly, the bigger issue was the proliferation of windmills that provide electricity. In a land that's flatter than pee on a platter, putting a hundred or so of them together ruins the view from the back patio. They say that they are also noisy.

As a matter of fact, I guess people in Japan, Sweden, Denmark, France, Switzerland, Australia and the United States are all pretty stupid too. They all seemed to have embraced the idea of burning garbage to make either heat or electricity. My guess is that they do or did have reservations about it, but in the end there were no other alternatives.

Those "idiots" in Europe also tend to ride their bikes to work and shopping and wouldn't think of lining up in idling cars to buy a cup of coffee in a wax-lined paper cup. We have been way behind in looking after our garbage and the way we pollute our earth. We need to start thinking a lot more proactively.

Now, I am no expert on any of this technology. I do know a bit about landfill sites. No one wants them anymore except big cities like Toronto. Those crazy people in Europe have pretty well banned landfill. I have noticed a lot of rhetoric lately about the proposed WTE facility in Courtice and am really starting to wonder what is true, what is accurate, what is nonsense. So, I started by doing my own research hoping to find some independent studies outlining and comparing the health risks of the various options. Its sort of like trying to sort the fly poop out of the pepper. I am sure that everyone has an opinion on what is "independent" but I tried my best. Who knows how truly independent they are as everyone probably has an agenda. I found a number of studies and my criteria was that it should appear to be independent and be recent. I only want to hear about modern technology and recent statistics.

My bit of research shows we have limited alternatives. You recycle/reduce/re-use everything or you bury it in the ground or you burn it. To bury or burn should be the last resort. However, I didn't see any of the doom and gloom from using "modern" WTE facilities that I have been reading about. Is the study by Columbia University a big lie? 'The 2006 Columbia University study says if you inhale gases from a landfill site, cancer risks are 41 per million. If you inhale gases from a WTE the cancer risk is 8 per million Another related study (June, 2005, Pearl Moy, Columbia University), found that overall health risks are 30 times worse from landfills compared to WTE. The study also showed that the emissions from diesel truck engines transporting waste to landfills resulted in a 10-fold increase in health risks. A study done in 1998 by New York State Department of Health found that women living near landfills where gas was migrating, have a four-fold increased chance of bladder cancer or leukemia.

So, what these two studies tell me is that landfill causes more health problems than WTE and that the diesel trucks hauling garbage cause more health problems than a modern WTE site.

I don't think I would camp out on either location but according to these studies, the landfill is five times worse.

Another relatively simple study done in 2004, commissioned by the Environment Protection Agency in the U.S.A., claims, "A family of four burning trash in a barrel in their backyard, still a common practice in many rural areas, can potentially put as much dioxin and furan into the air as a well-controlled municipal waste combustor serving tens of thousands of households." If this is true, who should we be going after?

Did the EPA in the US and, Sweden lie when they said that there are miniscule dioxin emissions from the modern WTE facility? I doubt it, but I love this community and I want to feel safe and reasonably assured that we are doing the right thing under the circumstances. Every country in this world has the same problem with garbage. Learn from the others instead of thinking they must be fools. Our local government has a tough job ahead. So, who are the stupid ones? Perhaps me for writing this.

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