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## **Total Landfill**

By: Margaret Zwart

We mentioned a few weeks ago that the Otter Lake Landfill site just outside of Halifax must be some kind of a mirage. We've heard such conflicting stories from some of the Regional Councillors who participated in a regionally sponsored tour of the facility last month, that it's hard to believe they all went on the same tour. Several Regional Councillors gave conflicting reports on the trip they took to the site in June.

Clarington Councillor Charlie Trim said he was not in support of stabilized landfill if it's like the one he saw at Otter Lake. He also said the landfill smelled. Yet the Chair of the Region's Health and Social Services Committee, Ms. April Cullen, said she didn't smell a bad odour when she got off the bus. Cullen, an Oshawa councillor, said the-fumes coming off the old Ritson Road landfill site are far worse than anything coming off the Otter Lake Landfill site, and there is a school built beside the Ritson Road site.

The Region of Durham is jointly involved with York Region in an environmental assessment for an incinerator as a waste management solution once the Michigan boarder closes to Ontario garbage in 2010. In 1999 Durham Regional council ruled out any new landfill sites in the Region.

Cullen said, following the Halifax trip, she thinks landfill deserves another look. She said some Regional council members may still change their minds on supporting incineration, and if that's the case, there needs to be a "Plan B." Cullen said she wouldn't have a problem with a stabilized landfill as an alternative to incineration, but she recognized there would have to be an extensive public education program launched to explain how stabilized landfill works.

Otter Lake Landfill, the only stabilized landfill site in North America, was created through a very public process, after the citizens of the Halifax Region said 'no' to incineration as a waste management solution. The citizens agreed to deal with their residual waste in a method that was as safe as possible, so they created a stabilized landfill site.

Waste is sorted and treated in a three step process before it is disposed of into a clay and plastic lined cell of a stabilized land-fill.

Besides being turned off by the smell at the Otter Lake land-fill site, another knock against the facility according to Councillor Trim was that the methane gas collected at the facility was just released into the atmosphere. At some landfill sites methane gas is collected and converted into energy. According to a spokesperson at the Otter Creek landfill site, there isn't enough methane gas generated at the site to collect. Methane gas, which is 20 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, is produced when tons of trash decay in landfills. Since most of the decaying matter is removed from the Halifax waste stream before landfill, minimal methane is produced.

Councillor Mary Novak, who also took part in the Regional junket to Halifax, did not come back singing the praises of stabilized landfill. Her comments were, "It wasn't all bad."

With so much confusion about the Otter Lake Landfill site, there is nothing left to do but go and see it for myself. When I booked my tour I was informed that because there is so much interest in the Landfill Site, operators are charging \$50 for a tour. Imagine, a thriving tourism industry centered on a dump site. Despite all the promotion dollars we invested into Total Hockey, they probably make more in one day at the dump than we ever made at the hockey museum.

We will be taking a two week break after this issue. Besides touring the Otter Lake Landfill site, I've also booked a tour in the Valley Region where they are having a lot of success diverting waste using the clear bag program. As interesting as garbage is, I won't be spending the whole two weeks in Nova Scotia immersed in waste issue. We are looking forward to the ocean, sight seeing and some fish feeds.