

Burning of waste trashed in Durham

Critic tells forum toxic metal storm will invade the air

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"God recycles, the devil burns."

That sums up every argument Durham residents might need to oppose an incinerator in their midst, according to a leading authority on waste management.

Paul Connett, a U.S. researcher, professor and speaker, used the slogan at a public forum in Oshawa Wednesday night to drive home a passionate, 30-minute message on the evils of burning garbage.

The resulting fly ash sends toxic nanoparticles into the air that evade most modern pollution-control devices, he said.

"If you think the smog is bad now, wait until you've converted thousands of tons of trash into thousands and thousands of tons of these tiny particles that ferry toxic metals into the brain."

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty "is talking utter nonsense, pure poppycock" about zero emissions from incinerators, Connett said. McGuinty made the comment last month about a facility that's nearing completion in Nepean, Ont.

The forum, organized by the Durham Regional Environment Council of the Canadian Auto Workers, was supposed to be a "pro" and "con" debate on a proposed energy-from-waste facility in either Clarington or York Region.

But representatives from provincial and regional governments declined to appear, said moderator Dave Renaud, leaving only opponents of incineration to make their case.

Connett was joined by panellists John Jackson, a waste-management expert, and Markham Councillor Erin Shapero in getting the crowd of 90 people fired up over the idea of achieving zero waste by recycling everything back to nature or the marketplace.

Shapero said Markham managed to go from 35 to 70 per cent diversion of trash to composting and recycling in two years and is aiming for 75 per cent next year.

Among their successes is a partnership with Goodwill for household items, a recycling depot for such items as Styrofoam and scrap metal, and an education program encouraging residents to buy products with little or no packaging.

"Our tax dollars are going to disposable products that manufacturers wash their hands of," Shapero said, adding the town's goal is zero waste by 2020.

"Don't let them (politicians) tell you it can't be done because it can."

Jackson criticized the province for failing to help with composting or make any progress with "extended producer responsibility" (EPR) which means manufacturers get their product back at the end of its life.

In place of the proposed \$250 million incinerator, Connett, a professor of chemistry at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y., suggested a network of research facilities to find other uses for the residual waste that can't be recycled or composted.