

Incinerator won't hurt health, study says

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But red flags still exist for energy from waste facilities

By: Serena Willoughby

Having an incinerator burning trash in York Region will likely have little adverse health and ecological effects on residents and the surrounding environment, according to a study.

There are still, however, a few "red flags" to consider, including the impacts incineration and the chemicals it produces could have on direct inhalation, soil contact, water quality, produce, fish, wild game and agriculture, the study stated.

The study, completed by a health and ecological risk assessment team including a medical doctor and toxicologist, concluded there are a limited number of potential human health and ecological concerns associated with burning household trash.

The consultant team considered a worst-case scenario where commercial workers, daycare toddlers and the environment in which they come in contact would be located only 300 metres from an energy-to-waste facility.

The scope of the study was limited, however, in light of the fact each of the four potential sites — one proposed for East Gwillimbury and three for Clarington in Durham Region — have different characteristics.

Concerns regarding exposure to dioxins and furans associated with the proposed \$250-million incinerator were conveyed by the team during a public information meeting Tuesday night in Newmarket.

Dioxins and furans are toxic chemicals found in small amounts in the environment known to have a wide range of adverse health effects. The study suggested the incinerator could cause elevated levels of these chemicals.

"These are red flags and we're going to make sure we cover them," consultant Chris Ollson said, adding once a site is confirmed, the team could further rule out these potential concerns.

The region revised its commitment last week with Durham from sending half the needed trash to keep it running to a 12 per cent or 20,000 tonnes-a-year commitment.

Its many alternative waste-handling initiatives, including a growing green bin program, which will be running in all nine municipalities this fall, means it won't need the incinerator nearly as much.

This infuriated East Gwillimbury resident Ed Candolini, who formed a ratepayer group several months ago when the East Gwillimbury site was placed on a short list.

Mr. Candolini questioned why York Region was even involved in building an incinerator since it has so drastically lowered its commitment.

In fact, enthusiasm for the project seems to have smouldered.

Conspicuously absent from the meeting were York's director of solid waste management Andy Campbell and chairperson of the solid waste management committee Mario Ferri who

both sent regrets.

East Gwillimbury Mayor Jamie Young stormed out of the meeting after registering his dissatisfaction residents were only given 13 days notice of the public consultations.

He also apologized on behalf of York Regional council about the lack of notice and the fact he was the only member of council present.

"This is a very serious issue and we in East Gwillimbury have very serious concerns about it, and we're not endorsing it," he said and walked out without hearing the study's findings.

Newmarket council is considering what its position is on the incinerator and is having a traffic impact study done to assess the potential impact in Newmarket of trucks bringing waste to a site on Bales Road from across York and Durham regions. Council will vote on its position Monday.

Dongara Developments will soon begin constructing a facility that will turn garbage into pellets to be used to manufacture cement. The facility will take about 100,000 tonnes of trash per year once construction is finished in 2008, the region estimated.

You can comment on the issue until July 31 by calling 905-307-8628 or toll free at 1-866-398-4423 or email info@durhamyorkwaste.ca