

Incinerator study may be trash

East Gwillimbury

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Errors may undermine York-Durham waste management process: review

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Errors in the Durham-York incinerator study may undermine the process as a whole, a peer review of the study states.

Choosing the site for the proposed incinerator to deal with York and Durham's waste before choosing the size and type of technology makes assessing the environmental effects very difficult, says a report completed by fellow environmental planner Steven Rowe.

It would be preferred if information on the vendor, technologies and their environmental effects was available for the site comparison, the report states.

The report also questions why greenbelt lands, such as a short-listed site in East Gwillimbury, were brought into the process and why other lands in the greenbelt are not considered.

There are four possible sites for the incinerator, one in East Gwillimbury and three in Clarington in Durham Region.

The report calls into question the site selection process, saying the study's consultants hadn't explained how the criteria affected the approach now being taken.

"It is possible that the cumulative effects of unresolved errors in the process will undermine the validity of the process as a whole," the report says in its conclusion.

The report has not yet been made public, but a copy was obtained by York Region Media Group and Newmarket residents group Communities First.

"We believe, based on the terms of reference, the process is flawed," Communities First spokesperson Ed Candolini said.

The incinerator study team will decide if the comments in the peer review are justified and if so, they will be taken into consideration, said Andy Campbell, York Region's director of waste management.

Although Mr. Campbell could not speak to the peer review report prepared for Clarington, he explained if it was necessary to modify the study process, they would.

"At the end of the day, we consider all comments," he said.

The review was commissioned by Clarington when the municipality found itself on a short list of potential incinerator host sites.

But the report was taken off Clarington's agenda last week after Durham requested additional time for its consultants to clarify technical matters with the peer reviewers.

The report is now set to be presented at a Sept. 4 Clarington meeting.

Members of Communities First joined Clarington residents to protest the incinerator at Clarington Town Hall Aug. 8.

Residents say they believe withholding the report from the public compromises the integrity of the process.

"It certainly calls into question how independent those reports will be. I think the incident has tainted the EA (environmental assessment) process," the protest's organizer, Linda Gasser, said.

At a meeting in Newmarket July 24 to allow the region to present information on the proposed incinerator, residents questioned why a peer review process was not done in York.

Representatives from the region said it is up to the host municipality to request it.

East Gwillimbury council has stated it will not be a willing host for the incinerator, citing air quality concerns and the fact the sole York Region option for the facility, a site on Bales Road, is in the greenbelt.

Newmarket may also withdraw support for the facility but will wait until next month for results of a traffic study on the impact of trucks bringing waste through Newmarket.

The study team will recommend in the next few weeks which site would be most suitable for the incinerator.