

## 'Put or pay' discourages diversion

Columns/Editorials

York and Durham regions are moving forward with plans to create an energy from waste incinerator to get rid of all the garbage we can't eliminate any other way.

Last week, Markham Councillor Erin Shapero challenged regional politicians over their support for the program.

Ms Shapero has long been an opponent of incineration, arguing it produces toxic ash. She says the facility is unnecessary because everyone can divert all of their waste — or at least enough so that what's left can be buried in existing landfills.

While that seems unrealistic, the region must address her concerns.

Notably, the fact it could penalize York for diverting waste.

A "put or pay" clause commits York Region to contributing 50,000 tonnes of garbage a year or it incurs a fine.

Right now, that's not a problem. York sends about five times that much trash to landfill every year.

But when that statistic was taken, only Markham was using green bins to reduce organic waste — and Markham diverts nearly 70 per cent of its waste from landfill, compared to less than 40 per cent in the rest of the region.

As other towns get on the wet-dry bandwagon this year, York should dramatically decrease its garbage output.

York will probably still produce more than 50,000 tonnes of garbage in the immediate future. But in the long run, who knows?

Does the region want to commit itself by committing to a minimum waste "contribution"?

Speaking of Markham's GTA-leading waste diversion program, that town won't see any benefits from it in the incineration plan, as it's written.

Despite the fact Markham expects to divert 80 per cent of its waste by 2008, it would be paying more toward the incinerator than its less green neighbours.

The region funds projects based on population, meaning Markham pays the most, even though it plans to use it least.

So Ms Shapero can already demonstrate the incineration proposal includes economic deterrents to reducing waste.

The region's solid waste committee is studying the "put or pay" clause. Ideally, it should reject any such clause.

Practically, it would be difficult to produce energy without some indication of how much "fuel" one can reasonably expect.

York needs to consider carefully how much garbage it will need to burn 10 or 20 years from now and set a bar at or below that level.

If it really can't do better than 50,000 tonnes, then keep that quota. If it can cut more, it shouldn't give itself a reason to rest on its laurels.