

## The devil burns: anti-incineration speakers say

May 10, 2007

By Erin Hatfield

DURHAM - "God recycles - the devil burns," read a power point slide that hung over a May 9 anti-incineration meeting.

The message from a panel of waste experts was the Region shouldn't investigate a way to destroy garbage with energy from waste, but should look at not creating it at all.

The public forum at the Oshawa CAW Hall was organized by the Canadian Auto Workers Durham Region Environmental Council as a means to present another angle to the debate over whether Durham and York regions should build an energy-from-waste facility to deal with their garbage.

"We want to make sure there is enough information about the negative impacts of an incineration facility than what is coming out from the Region," said Dave Renaud, president of the council.

The nearly 100 residents and six Regional councillors who attended the forum heard impassioned arguments not only against incineration, but also in favour of a zero-waste society. "Say a resounding 'no' to incineration; you don't want to throw away your money on something that 25 years from now will take you no closer to sustainability," said Dr. Paul Connett. "If we are going to struggle with waste, let's struggle with a solution that takes us in the right direction and that means reusing, recycling and composting. If we can't do that then industry shouldn't be making it."

Dr. Connett, a graduate of Cambridge University and a professor of chemistry at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, said the problems with incineration are with economics, toxicity and sustainability.

Economically, Dr. Connett said, incineration is a disaster and costs a huge amount of money.

"Most of that money is going to go into complicated machinery and leave the Region," he said. "Whereas the money put into the alternatives will stay in the Region creating jobs and small businesses."

He went on to say incinerators produce dioxins, the most toxic substances ever made.

"Even if we could make incineration safe we could never make it sensible," Dr. Connett said. "It simply does not make sense to spend a huge amount of money destroying resources we should be sharing with the future."

He strongly encourages municipalities to adopt a zero-waste strategy by 2020.

"Zero waste requires a combination of community responsibility at the back end of the problem and industrial responsibility at the front end," he said.

John Jackson, who spoke on behalf of Great Lakes United, has worked on waste issues for the past 25 years.

"We are really moving backwards in Ontario in how we deal with waste," Mr. Jackson said.

He explained 15 years ago the provincial government said, 'no more incinerators'. Today it is pushing incinerators, promoting building them and making it easier to get approval. According to Mr. Jackson, that's wrong.

"I hope people leave tonight and say, 'Hey we have to make sure York and Durham stop any idea they have of building an incinerator'," he said.

Erin Shapero, a Markham councillor, spoke about that community's success in reaching 70-per-cent diversion.

"York is spending millions of dollars to build something that we as a municipality want to make obsolete," she said.

Among Durham's elected officials in attendance was Clarington Councillor Charlie Trim, chairman of the works committee, who said he agrees with having all sides of the debate presented.

"We are in an examination phase, so my concept is I'm open until the time we have to make a decision," Coun. Trim said. "At that point I have to weigh the pros and cons of whatever was presented and make a decision."