

Air quality in York better than Clarington incinerator site

Critics question why report comes after site selection

Thu Mar 06, 2008

By Reka Szekely

DURHAM -- The Region's consultants confirmed that air quality at an East Gwillimbury site short-listed for a proposed incinerator is better than at the Clarington site that was eventually chosen.

The consultants initiated the monitoring, conducted at three sites. One was in East Gwillimbury in York and two were in Clarington, at Courtice Road near Hwy. 401, near the selected site, and at Bennett Road and Hwy. 401.

The results were in line with the assumptions, based on Environment Canada and industrial data, used in picking the preferred site, said consultant Jim McKay of Jacques Whitford Limited.

"Even though it's slightly better in East Gwillimbury, it doesn't mean you can't build this facility in Clarington and not impact your air quality," he said at the Durham-York Joint Waste Management Group (JWVG) meeting on Tuesday.

The monitoring was conducted from September to December 2007 and looked at sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide (NOx), carbon monoxide, ozone and fine particulate matter.

The maximum measurements of sulphur dioxide, NOx, carbon monoxide and ozone did not surpass the Ministry of the Environment's limits, although NOx readings at the Courtice Road site came closest.

Mr. McKay said it's possible that those limits could be exceeded. Air pollution levels tend to be higher during the summer months. He offered to continue to update the JWVG, however the results would be for the Clarington site only as monitoring in East Gwillimbury has stopped.

"I think I'd like to see those snapshots as we move through," said Clarington Councillor Mary Novak.

At this point, said the report, there's insufficient data to assess fine particulate levels according to the Canada-wide standard because that would require monitoring over a three-year period of time. However, that standard is 30 micrograms per cubic metre and there were three occasions when the Courtice Road site's daily average exceeded that. The highest single reading, 63.8 micrograms per cubic metre, was at the East Gwillimbury site.



Walter Passarella / Metroland WHITBY -- About a dozen people were on hand protesting the vote on garbage incineration at Durham Regional Headquarters on Tuesday afternoon, Mar. 4, 2008

Mr. McKay said regardless of the site, emissions from the incinerator cannot exceed Ministry of the Environment standards, even if the air quality in the area does.

"We can't go beyond that."

In fact, after the meeting, Mr. McKay said that in areas with very poor air quality, pollution controls in incinerators clean the air because the air drawn in is more polluted than what is released.

"There are facilities in Europe where that is certainly the case," he said.

Linda Gasser, a consistent critic of the incineration project, wondered why the monitoring results were being discussed now.

"I think it's absolutely ridiculous that this report was released two months after the Region rushed to adopt the recommended site," she said.

Ms. Gasser said all the short-listed sites should have been monitored for a longer period of time.

"So really, there won't be any complete data on what's the best site and that's one key thing that's missing from this process."

Though originally intended for York, the next JWMG meeting will be held in Durham April 15. The group will look at guidelines for a community advisory committee, required by the environmental assessment, at that meeting.