

Gasification could be a boon to area

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Port Hope could soon be a leader in the energy-from-waste business.

At least that's the hope of a Sunbay Energy, which is seeking approvals to build a gasification power plant on a 23-acre site west of Wesleyville Road, south of Hwy. 401. The plasma gasification system would be able to handle 400 tons of municipal waste daily. Port Hope council heard last Tuesday night the company can break down the waste using plasma and high temperatures, produce a synthetic gas that can create energy for up to 25,000 homes a day, and end up with a glassy material that can be sold for road paving material, or even bricks and tiles.

The gasification system has been used in Bordeaux, France, for 15 years with positive results, Managing Director Jordan Oxley said.

This isn't the first time the subject of gasification has been broached at council's table, but this time, the company in question is not looking for up-front money from the municipality. In fact, as it enters into the approvals process with the municipality and province, Sunbay Energy is opening a storefront at 35 Walton St., so residents can keep tabs on its progress.

Although Mr. Oxley had many explanations at Tuesday's night's meeting, there are still questions that require answers, including the sort of emissions a gasification plant spouts into the atmosphere. Of course, this will be addressed by the Ministry of Environment as it compiles its information, but you can be sure many local groups and individuals will take it upon themselves to research the technology, seeing how little the ministry is trusted.

Another question is whether Northumberland County will become a Sunbay Energy customer, as tipping fees might not be a fit for its budget. With landfill space currently at a premium, it would be shocking if the county didn't show an interest.

Mr. Oxley also said 200 construction jobs and 50 post-construction jobs for a variety of skill sets would be created by the plant, something that should always come as good news to a municipality losing manufacturing jobs, and in desperate need of an influx of business tax revenue.

There must be better ways to dispose of man-made waste than burying it underground. If this technology is sound and environmental issues are addressed, it's hard not to see the proposal in a positive light. But this is Port Hope, after all, and nothing of any magnitude slips by the engaged members of the public.

A 2010 start-up date in Port Hope is likely optimism at its best.