

Did You Know?

The Facts And Issues

...that Durham and York Regions are moving forward with their plan to build an incinerator in Durham? Halton and Niagara Regions have stopped their plans for incineration, so why haven't we?



Things You Should Know About Incineration:

1. Health Effects – Incinerators, even those with the ‘best’ technologies, emit highly toxic substances including dioxins, furans, and heavy metals (lead, mercury, etc.), as well as large quantities of acid gases, greenhouse gases and particulate matter into the air we breathe. Studies have shown higher rates of cancer and birth defects around municipal waste incinerators. The fetus, infant and child are most at risk from incinerator emissions. Incinerators are a major source of particulate matter, which is associated with lung and cardiovascular disease. Ultra-fine particulates can evade the best filters. They travel great distances, and once inhaled they can travel deep into the lungs, bloodstream, tissues and organs. 75 Durham Region doctors have strongly objected to this incinerator in a written petition to Durham Region. Who do you trust with your health: your Doctor or a Politician?

2. Toxins Accumulate And Enter Food Chain – Dioxins and furans are persistent; they do not break down and lose their toxicity under natural conditions. They enter our food chain primarily when animals eat contaminated plants and sediments and then pass them to us in dairy, fish and meat products. Should we continue to “buy local” if the food that we grow and eat becomes contaminated with cancer-causing dioxins and other pollutants?

3. Inadequate Emissions Standards & Monitoring - Durham Region promised us the best pollution control and monitoring technologies. Durham has reneged and only committed to limited soil and ambient air monitoring for the first three years of operation. Only a handful of the hundreds of compounds being emitted will be monitored continuously, and many other chemical compounds of *unknown* toxicity will not be monitored or regulated at all. This begs the question: even if high emissions could be detected, is it then too late for the people exposed to them?

4. What About Europe? – Even though Europe already has more stringent regulations as to what can be burned than what is proposed in Durham Region, so their waste stream is relatively “cleaner” than ours would be, there have been calls to improve European standards. In June 2008, over 33,000 doctors in the EU and worldwide sent an open letter to the European Parliament with their concerns regarding the health effects from incinerators and that ultra-fine particulate emissions are still not monitored in Europe. They are likewise not monitored or controlled in Canada, nor will they be monitored in Durham Region.

5. Expensive, Inflexible & Financially Risky - The incinerator is estimated to cost \$272.5 million dollars to build and \$14.7 million to run annually with only 33 long term jobs predicted for the facility. “PUT OR PAY” provisions for these projects require the community to guess the amount of waste that will be generated for the next 25-30 years. If they do not “PUT” as much waste as estimated, they are still required to “PAY” for it.

6. Need To Import Waste – Incinerators are designed to burn 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for the 25+ year life span of the facility, and cannot be turned on and off quickly or easily. This requirement to supply a continual and minimum waste load becomes a disincentive to reduction, reuse, recycling, repair and composting. We will be importing waste from York Region and there have been discussions with other municipalities to accept additional waste. The Regions propose a facility with an initial capacity of 140,000 tonnes of garbage per year with the option by Durham and/or York to increase the capacity to 400,000 tonnes annually.

7. Waste Of Energy & Resources – As an energy producer, incineration produces minimal energy, particularly if the recyclables are removed from the waste stream. They contribute more greenhouse gases per kilowatt-hour than coal-fired plants which are known for their “dirty energy”. Presently consumers pay the costs of disposal of waste products when the burden instead should be placed upon manufacturers and importers for them to reduce waste.

8. Safer Alternatives - The alternatives have been framed as “bury or burn”. In reality, incineration means “burn, then bury”. Approximately one third by weight of the material going to incineration ends up as ash that Covanta plans to send to landfill in NY, though they have indicated they will be pursuing Ontario landfill options. The “bottom ash” contains toxic residues and the “fly ash” is classified as hazardous waste.

A Better Way: There are alternatives that avoid incinerators and eventually eliminate landfills. As decisions are made for the next 25 years, alternatives for our residual waste must be chosen that have the lowest impact on the environment and human health. Better recycling and composting, reduced packaging and fewer disposable goods are strategies which also create “green” jobs. The Ontario Ministry of the Environment is already exploring how Ontario can implement “Zero Waste” strategies with input from industry and stakeholders.

For more information:

www.DurhamEnvironmentWatch.org

Fact sheet & references can be found at: www.DurhamEnvironmentWatch.org/incineration_articles.htm