

Ajax is just asking questions on our behalf

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By Jennifer Stone

The strawman has been ever present during the argument thus far on the proposed incinerator which could be built in Clarington.

It's been a common form of argument, this type of fallacy.

Take, for example, the forest fire stretch.

When those opposed to incineration came forward with concerns about the potential for dioxins and furans stemming from an incinerator stack, and brought with them information on how burning medical waste can lead to such toxins, they heard first from Pickering councillor Rick Johnson, then had it parroted again by Clarington's Charlie Trim at his local council, an argument about how forest fires spew such things, too.

Huh

One has nothing to do with another. That something which typically happens through accident or maliciousness produces some of the same results as something we might knowingly build here to run 24/7 for the next 30 years is really neither here nor there.

More recently, the strawman has been present in some Clarington councillor's responses to Ajax saying it couldn't support the proposed incinerator till an array of questions are answered.

The fallacy started to crop up soon after Ajax said it wanted a number of questions answered, like the cost to taxpayers, waste diversion, what types of waste could be accepted and what will happen with residual ash.

Immediately, Clarington Mayor Jim Abernethy raised the spectre of Ajax's own steam plant, which he referred to as a 1940s-style incinerator.

Then, during a subsequent Clarington council meeting, Mayor Abernethy discussed a one-time proposal by companies called Dongarra and Arbour Power, whereby Dongarra would produce pellets using municipal waste from York Region to be incinerated in Pickering. That's no longer on the table, but you wouldn't have known it from what Mayor Abernethy said.

(Incidentally, the Clarington mayor's comments prompted an immediate response from Index Energy, which is in the process of acquiring the steam plant to, using modern technology, incinerate wood biomass -- not municipal waste.)

But, even if the Dongarra-Arbour proposal was still under consideration, what Mayor Steve Parish had said then was that all Ajax's concerns had to be dealt with before such a project could go ahead. Quite the opposite from what Clarington's mayor suggested, the Ajax position isn't at all inconsistent.

Ajax has simply asked for answers before being asked to make decisions. They don't want us making decisions on matters such as preferred site in isolation from other decisions, like technology and cost.

And we should be asking the same.