

Orono Times
February 16, 2008

Letter to the Editor,

Re: Idiots in Europe

As reasonable as Mr. Van Dyke's letter [Feb 13] seems on the surface, a closer look reveals that it is rife with errors.

Error # 1 - If a lot of people do it, it must be right. Once upon a time we thought thalidomide, asbestos, PCBs and lead in gasoline were all great things. CFCs were once touted as the 'safest chemical ever invented.' Heck, for decades the tobacco industry told us that smoking was safe and we know that's not true – though millions are still puffing away on the death stick. Let's face it: If a million people have a stupid idea, it's still a stupid idea.

Error # 2 – It's okay with the people over there. Whether somebody complains about incineration has absolutely no bearing on whether incineration is safe. And I would hazard a guess that if citizens don't complain, it is because they think their governments are protecting them. Consider these real-life examples of "public protection":

- A study at a Netherlands incinerator found that the standard six-hour test for dioxin emissions underestimated those emissions by a factor of 30 to 50.
- In Newcastle, UK, incinerator ash samples used to build pathways in public gardens and parks were found to contain 1,950 nanograms of carcinogenic dioxins. The allowable limit: 5 nanograms.
- In Indianapolis, Indiana the local incinerator exceeded its permitted pollutants limits more than 6,000 times, including bypassing its air pollution control devices 18 times in less than two years.
- A round of surprise government inspections revealed nearly 400 health, safety or environmental violations at 29 US hazardous waste incinerator sites, according to the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Error # 3 – Windmills etc. are worse than incineration. Windmills are used to create energy. Incineration is used to burn garbage. The two can't really be compared. And if we are talking energy, Ontario has already decided to phase out coal fire plants because they are too dirty. Incineration is dirtier.

Error # 4 – Landfill is worse than incineration. What Mr. Van Dyke fails to understand is that even if landfill emissions are more dangerous than incinerator emissions (and such an assertion is highly questionable based on research evidence), a much larger number of people are going to be breathing the incinerator emissions. Landfill keeps waste disposal dangers local; incinerators share them with people across the region as well as into neighbouring regions, provinces and countries.

Then there is the vital but very persistent flaw in the landfill versus incineration dichotomy...For every three to four tones of waste burned, one tonne of toxic ash is created and must be landfilled. Ergo, incineration does not eliminate the need for landfill. In fact, it creates even more toxic landfill.

Error # 5 – Dioxins are the only threat from incinerators. The incinerator industry likes to focus on dioxins because they can make such 'cutesy' comparisons to burning logs, driving

cars or setting off fireworks displays. However, what they miss is the other pollutants emitted from incinerators...*hundreds* of toxic pollutants.

In Sweden alone, one incinerator annually emits about 58 tons of nitrogen oxide, 11.5 tons of sulphur, .82 tons of particulates, 3.5 tons of hydrogen chloride, 1.3 kg of mercury, 1.8 kg of lead and .17 kg of cadmium. (And keep in mind, these are only the pollutants that Sweden measures.)

And noted even in the Durham consultant's health assessment – there is almost no research available regarding the added toxicity of these chemicals and pollutants when they are burned together in an incinerator.

I do agree with Mr. Van Dyke on one point - We are way behind in managing our garbage, which is the very reason that we cannot allow the building of incinerators. If our provincial or federal governments can't even force Tim Hortons to use recyclable cups how on earth do we expect politicians and bureaucrats to control the incineration industry and to protect us the dangers that their emissions present?

Kristin McKinnon-Rutherford
Courtice, Ontario