

Toronto Star

Letters to the Editor:

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Connecting Today's News, Ontario's Communities and Air Quality Issues

Since 1983 the residents of the Riverdale and the Beach communities have rallied to put an end to waste incineration in Toronto. Why the difference in decision-making on waste management between Toronto and the Durham and York Regions? When Toronto citizens brought forward the research on health effects, high costs, wasted resources and minimal power production a majority of Toronto politicians and the Board of Health agreed with them. Thanks to the efforts of hundreds of citizens in East End Toronto and its politicians our air here is less polluted in Toronto than Durham and that's before the Ministry of the Environment could allow the proposed Durham incinerator and that's after the Ontario Ministry of the Environment in its recently released Toxics Reduction Act has lamented the fact that Ontario's air hasn't improved over the past 30 years in spite of air regulations that are in place to protect the health of Ontarians.

The Canadian Medical Association, the Ontario Medical Association and the Toronto Board of Health concur on air pollution and its effects. Their air computer models tell an Ontario story of increased cardiovascular and respiratory illness in the population from extended exposures to current air quality, of irreversible lung damage in young people, of increased health costs due to more frequent doctor's visits, emergency department visits and hospital admissions, of increased loss of economic productivity, of personal pain and suffering and loss of life. If you haven't already done so visit their websites and look at their studies. That's why the Ontario Ministry of the Environment should turn down the proposed Durham incinerator with its release of tonnes of criteria air pollutants that form the basis of the air models, with its release of 82 contaminants of concern and with its release of greenhouse gases that, according to the US EPA exceed (tonee for tonne combusted) those emitted by coal-fired power plants.

The furor in Oakville over the proposed 900 megawatt gas peaking plant and Oakville air quality is no less concerning than is the furor in Durham over the proposed Waste-to-Energy Plant.. In East End Toronto, our community stopped numerous proposed waste incinerators in the nearby Port Lands Industrial area and, more recently, we valiantly tried to stop the siting by Ontario Power Generation of a gas peaking plant. Now, through required reporting to the Portlands Energy Centre Community Liaison Committee (PEC CLC), we learn that start-ups are causing exceedances of the 24-hr carbon monoxide levels. One health study shows that even one hour of high carbon monoxide levels are a health concern for the elderly. Since start-ups are a normal, rather than infrequent event for all Ontario gas peaking plants (as they were intended for intermittent use) members of the Board of Citizens for a Safe Environment think that the plant should be expected to meet the emission limits with the start-ups included.

Catalytic air pollution control equipment is currently commercially available for gas turbines to reduce carbon monoxide emissions. Premier McGuinty has stated that he will take protective measures. The Ontario Ministry of the Environment is reporting its solution to the problem at the next PEC CLC meeting. Will it be pollution control of carbon monoxide exceedances or will it be a relaxing of the regulations?

Wake-up Ontarians the air we breathe is shared locally and globally and in Ontario it is making us sick...no it is killing us, according to the Canadian Medical Association, the Ontario Medical Association and the Toronto Board of Health. While the Ontario Ministry is looking to get any amount of power from any non-renewable dirty source Sweden today announced that it will be investing in 2000 new windmills to expand its energy production by 25 terawatts. Ontarians, you need to make some choices and tell your politicians what you want them to do...and do it today...it's five minutes to twelve.

Karen Buck, President
Citizens for a Safe Environment

Source:

1. Canadian Medical Association Study "No Breathing Room" August 2008
2. Ontario Medical Association Study "The Illness Cost of Air Pollution" June 2005
3. Toronto Board of Health Studies "*Air Pollution Burden of Illness in Toronto.*" April 2000

"Burden of illness studies provide a reliable and cost-effective mechanism by which local health authorities can estimate the magnitude of adverse health impacts from air pollution. In 2004, Toronto Public Health (TPH) estimated that air pollution (from all sources) is responsible for about 1,700 premature deaths and 6,000 hospitalizations each year in Toronto. The study indicated that these deaths would not have occurred when they did without chronic exposure to air pollution at the levels experienced in Toronto."

The above quote is from the Executive Summary or a more recent Toronto Board of Health Report entitled "Air Pollution Burden of Illness from Traffic in Toronto"