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EDITORIAL

Clarington's Earth Hour has expired

As the world moves toward another Earth Hour celebration, interest in the event locally seems to be ebbing.

Clarington embraced Earth Hour in the past, and has even been the leader in Durham Region for the highest reduction of power consumption for the hour.

Earth Hour is a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) event started in Sydney, Australia in 2007, in which participants are asked to turn off their lights for one hour to raise awareness about climate change.

In the past, Earth Hour was promoted in Clarington by the council-appointed Living Green Committee, but we no longer have a Living Green Committee.

Other than the posters Regional Councillor Mary Novak showed up with at Monday's committee meeting, we have not seen a single poster promoting this year's Earth Hour. Novak left with her posters at the end of the meeting.

The WWF, who have used free concerts in the city of Toronto to raise awareness of global warming during Earth Hour, have opted to forgo the concert this year. For the past three years, the concerts had been the city's main Earth Hour event. Last year, the concert attracted only hundreds of people compared to the more than 10,000 in 2008.

Not only is participation in Earth Hour declining, the concept is taking some heat.

Last year, David Suzuki was quoted as saying, "Saving the planet from catastrophic global warming is not about turning the lights off for one hour. I've always said we should have every day as Earth Day."

David Seymour, senior policy analyst at the Frontier Centre, says the Earth Hour ritual possesses a curious blend of contradictions. "Earth Hour won't reduce the consumption of resources, it only delays it."

As a symbol, Earth Hour won't send a message to politicians and its hollowness causes other problems, according to Seymour. "The message politicians get is that people think this fights climate change, and any policies that actually restrict access to carbon-based energy would be political suicide."

Having Councillor Mary Novak champion Earth Hour is also a contradiction. Novak was one of the three Clarington councillors last term who did everything they could to help the Region build its new garbage incinerator in Clarington, in her own Ward.

Novak introduced a motion on Monday championing Earth Hour and Clarington's participation in the event. Her motion recognizes that climate change and energy consumption are two of the biggest environmental threats to our planet. Participating in Earth Hour is about creating and demonstrating leadership for making a difference toward climate change. She also states that Earth Hour provides Clarington with the occasion to build a positive image and demonstrate environmental leadership.

Coming from Councillor Novak, these statements all ring hollow.

The proposed incinerator will be the biggest threat to the environment this municipality has ever known. Clarington's image will be have nowhere to go but down, once the incinerator starts spewing smoke and toxins into the air beside the 401 in Courtice, the gateway to Clarington.

Novak had her chance to show environmental leadership last term, when she had the opportunity to oppose the incinerator. She blew that chance, and now anything she says to demonstrate leadership in making a difference toward climate change is just more hot air.

Earth Hour is a concept whose time has probably come and gone. Giving up light and renouncing technology for an hour is more of a celebration of sacrifice than an effort to change our resource-wasting lifestyles.