

Ont. wants to be global leader in garbage incineration despite concerns of critics

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TORONTO (CP) - Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty says he wants the province to be an innovator in garbage incineration, even though environmental groups call it a dirty, expensive technology.

The government will allow municipalities to launch incineration pilot projects and skip a lengthy environmental assessment process if they meet certain conditions.

McGuinty says emissions standards will still be respected and it will help the province become an innovator.

He says he doesn't want to lose potential jobs or business to countries like Austria or Germany and would like to see companies investing in the province.

It would also give municipalities more options to solve problems with limited landfill space.

But environmentalists say the premier should be focusing on recycling instead of burning garbage, which is expensive and can create more emissions than burning coal.

"When you burn garbage you're putting out 33 per cent more carbon dioxide than when you burn coal, and the United Nations environment program says that 60 per cent of the world's dioxins comes from burning garbage," said New Democrat critic Peter Tabuns.

"This premier is caught up with convenience in dealing with a problem and is not interested in sustainability or dealing with climate change."

McGuinty said he's aware of the environmental concerns, but said the new pilot projects will be a lot different.

He pointed to a small, existing pilot project in Ottawa that incinerates household waste and turns it into a gas, which generates energy and is clean.

"That gas, as it turns out, burns cleaner than natural gas, so it's better for the environment. There are fewer greenhouse gas, fewer toxic emissions, so I think that's something we should be exploring here in Ontario," he said.

But McGuinty wouldn't say that all new incinerators will spew no emissions, although they will all have to meet the government's regulations.

"What we're saying is they have to always respect our rigorous air quality standards, you cannot compromise that."