

A tale of waste management

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Air emissions, health and the environment are legitimate concerns when considering energy-from-waste (EFW) as a means of dealing with Durham's garbage. Residents are right in passionately questioning the technology, its effect on diversion, truck traffic and site location, as they did at the most recent round of public information sessions held in Clarington.

But, it was clear many haven't followed the process up to this point and aren't privy to the groundwork the Region has laid.

As the story goes, a long time ago, the Region realized garbage was getting to be a problem and Regional Council passed a resolution saying no more landfills.

Then in the mid 90s, Durham started shipping waste to Michigan, but even then it was recognized that trucking trash across the border was no good. So about seven years ago council developed a long-term waste management strategy. Part of the plan was to maximize diversion and then figure out a homegrown way of dealing with what was left over. Ergo council started down the road to a long-term waste management solution. It implemented the blue box and green bin programs and set out to identify how they would deal with garbage.

It looked at a range of alternatives and consulted the public. A terms of reference was developed and subsequently approved by the Province.

In April 2006 consultants finally recommended thermal treatment with the recovery of energy as Durham's best option, but only after evaluating the effects of a bunch of different systems on the natural, social, economic, technical and legal environments.

But, there are lots of different thermal treatments, so a delegation skipped on over to Europe to check out a variety of them, including incinerators and a mechanical biological facilities.

Another round of public meetings was held and people gave input on what the criteria for site selection should be.

It wasn't until June 2006 that Durham and York councils approved EFW as the preferred method. They then got on with trying to get a short list of sites, released in late March.

That brings us to today, but this story is far from finished. There is much work to be done, including narrowing down exactly what kind of technology will be used. But, clearly this isn't a case of waste management on a whim. There has been extensive research and public consultation and there will continue to be right up until a shovel goes into the ground.

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Note from D.E.W.: *"It wasn't until June 2006 that Durham and York councils approved EFW as the preferred method."*

Actually, Durham Region passed a resolution in 1999 declaring Thermal Treatment (Energy From Waste) to be their preferred method of waste management. Public consultations to determine "Alternatives To" in 2005/06 did nothing to change Durham Council's minds on their preferred method. The Consultants were hired to promote EFW, not to do unbiased studies or to seriously consider other alternatives. In 1999 Durham Region produced a document called "**Region of Durham Long Term Waste Management Strategy Plan: 2000 to 2020**" in which they declare, *"The long term waste management plan will: Support the development of 'Energy From Waste; type facilities to generate steam and/or electricity from the disposal of residual garbage wastes."* The decision was made long before the 'public consultations' in 2005/06.