

(CATCH = Citizens AT City Hall) Hamilton, ON

CATCH Articles:

Municipalities backing away from incineration

Jun 21, 2007

Halton region is abandoning its plans to build a garbage incinerator, and York, Niagara and perhaps Hamilton are moving in the same direction. Environmental and health impacts are behind this trend as well as the cost of incineration and its negative effect on waste diversion.

Globe and Mail writer John Barber reported last week that Halton's planning committee "led by new regional chair Gary Carr, voted unanimously and definitively to cancel its once-grandiose plan to build a large incinerator to burn garbage from across Greater Toronto."

The Spectator confirmed today that the full Halton council has now ratified the committee decision. It came in the wake of a peer review that questioned various aspects of the region's report on the potential health and environmental impacts of the proposed incinerator.

The [review](#) was carried out by Hamilton's Dr David Pengelly and pointed to "ambiguity in defining the potential health risk associated with the EFW (Energy from Waste) facility, and in particular those risks associated with criteria pollutants or pathogens."

Pengelly noted that nitrogen dioxide "is responsible for a substantial burden of premature mortality" in Halton and "the introduction of another major source of fine particles and oxides of nitrogen by virtue of siting a large EFW facility where it is proposed may not be an acceptable choice for the health of the population living within this airshed."

Halton's decision follows one by York Region to back out of a partnership with Durham for an incinerator and reduce its funding commitment to 12 percent, a step Barber suggests means the joint facility will never be built.

He also pointed out that Niagara Region has made arrangements with a private landfill and appears to be abandoning its four-year collaboration with Hamilton in exploring incineration and other options for dealing with the third of their garbage that they don't expect to be composted or recycled.

"Its desertion means that Hamilton, like Durham, is now on its own with a project that just became hundreds of millions of dollars more expensive and far riskier than it first appeared," says Barber.

City staff say Barber has it wrong and has assured councillors that Niagara region wants to continue exploring long term disposal alternatives.

Beside the air pollution risks, a major criticism of burning waste is the requirement to provide a minimum amount of garbage to the private companies that build and own the incineration facilities. Municipalities must pay penalty fees if they fail to provide sufficient garbage, thus creating a major barrier to waste reduction efforts.

Barber says this fear of not being able to turn off the tap is an important factor in Niagara's abandonment of the incineration option. He quotes Niagara waste management director Barry Friesen who rejects the notion that incineration "is a silver bullet to solve the waste problem."

The [Niagara Hamilton Waste Plan](#) collaboration began in 2003 and according to councillor Russ Powers is about three-quarters of the way to a final decision. Officially it is examining a variety of options, but

incineration has had the inside track from the beginning and was the preferred option recommended in late 2005.

Public opposition to this approach convinced the joint working group to delay and explore other options including a stabilized landfill. They recently sought endorsement of a [shortcut approach](#) to the environmental assessment that is only available for EFW facilities. Planning committee approved the request, but it was [turned down](#) in an 8-7 vote at council.