

## York needs to take action, ownership in trash dilemma

Editorials

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York Region appears to be backpedalling on its commitment to burn household trash as a way to meet the province's lofty 2008 waste diversion targets.

Judging by a lack of presence by regional officials and politicians last week at a meeting to discuss health and environmental effects of a proposed incineration process, it seems the region has cooled on its initial enthusiasm to find a solution to divert 60 per cent of its waste to landfill.

The region partnered with Durham in 2005 to find a homegrown solution to landfill since trucking hundreds and thousands of tonnes of waste to Michigan and other sites can't continue any longer. (York ships more than 400 tonnes a day, five days a week at a cost of more than \$34,600 a day.)

Our garbage isn't welcome there and it has become an environmental boondoggle.

The partnership with Durham was struck as a way to finally deal with our own waste and because the two burgeoning communities don't want a dump in their back yards.

Incineration, billed in other countries as a much cleaner alternative to landfill, seemed like a good plan and both regions were to commit to a minimum amount of household trash to be sent to the site to keep it running and producing energy.

And, let's face it, York Region has not had a viable plan to handle its mounting trash troubles for more than a decade, so incineration, along with York's well-established blue box recycling and the onset of kitchen scrap diversion, seemed the perfect solution.

What if budgets look tight next year? Will the green bin programs be cancelled in some municipalities?

The region has now decided, however, to back off its half-split commitment with Durham, agreeing to send 20,000 tonnes of trash, or about one-fifth of the waste it produces each year, to be burned.

Touting the expansion of its kitchen waste green bin programs in all nine municipalities as a huge diversion method — wet household waste, including kitchen scraps and diapers make up about 40 per cent of all trash, studies show — the region is saying it won't need the incineration as much as it first thought.

The onslaught of opposition from environmental advocates, resident groups and some politicians, are, no doubt, another reason York is cooling on its trash burning plans.

Durham, of course, is up in arms.

As it should be.

York should be careful, though.

Let's not forget the first thing to go from most of York's municipal budget expenses last year, especially in the north end, was the startup of the green bin program.

It was too expensive, local councils complained, and it was put off by most towns until this

fall.

What if this happens again?

What if budgets look tight next year? Will the green bin programs be cancelled in some municipalities?

The region has to move on this issue.

The province has a mandated 60-per-cent waste diversion target starting next year and York — one of the biggest garbage-producing communities in Ontario — is thumbing its nose at a plan to handle the problem close to home.

Perhaps York bureaucrats are backing off the commitment as a way to avoid having a \$250-million incineration plant next door to its next big boom town, East Gwillimbury.

Perhaps it's getting cold feet after Newmarket's souring relationship and seemingly little clout with Halton Recycling.

Or, perhaps it's just another way to avoid the problem. Lax commitment to an incineration plant will surely nix any chance of the facility being located on York's doorstep.

But maybe the welcome mat to Durham will be too busy for York.

Durham could go ahead with incineration at one of the sites in its jurisdiction but after being stiffed by York, who knows what kind of controls or expenses will be put in place that may cause its "partner" even more headaches?

York needs to take responsibility and fast.

Residents need to remember who produces the trash and take ownership for its waste.