

Metroland – Clarington

Residents push for more waste information

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By: By Erin Hatfield

DURHAM – People pouring out to public meetings continue to push for details on energy-from-waste (EFW) and the impact it will have on health and the environment.

At the most recent round of EFW public information sessions, held between June 18 and 28, consultants contracted by the Region of Durham insisted all the details residents are after will only be known after the technology and site are selected.

"A detailed, site-specific assessment must be done before any facility could open," said Dr. Chris Ollson, a consultant with Jacques Whitford, at the session held on June 28 in Newcastle. Meetings were also held in Courtice and Bowmanville.

The final meeting, attended by approximately 60 residents, presented the consultant's conclusions from the Generic Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment Study.

Using a theoretical facility, Jacques Whitford consultants investigated the omission of chemicals and the impact on people's health and the environment. They estimated exhaust stack air emissions based largely on values obtained from stack testing of a facility in Brampton and concluded an EFW facility presents an acceptable risk.

The findings, consultants said, do represent the worst-case scenario. Consultant Dave Merriman said all vendors that would qualify to build and operate an EFW facility would be better than the theoretical facility used in the study.

But, Wendy Bracken, a Newcastle resident who has been vocal in her opposition to incineration, said dioxins and furans are created in the stacks of EFW facilities and no level is acceptable.

"The risk assessment was based almost entirely on Ontario Regulations," she said. "Many, including doctorates, say these regulations have not served us well."

She cited increasing rates of cancer and asked that a precautionary approach be taken.

"There are other technologies available; there are other things we can do," Ms. Bracken said. "The precautionary principal to me means avoid it if you know it is toxic."

Bowmanville resident John Traill agreed that energy from waste should be taken off the table.

"If this process is such a wonderful one then why doesn't every community have one and why doesn't every community want one," Mr. Traill said. "I propose we start by burning the garbage we heard in the first hour and a half (from consultants). This was a totally one-sided snow job."

Durham and York began work on an environmental assessment (EA) of energy from waste after identifying thermal technology as the preferred method of dealing with garbage. The findings of this latest study will be used to assist in the preferred site selection.

As the Region continues down the EA road there are more site studies and more public meetings to come.

"We are able to do a very detailed site evaluation, so if you live near these areas you will probably see people out in the next couple of weeks," said consultant Jim McKay.

There are four potential sites remaining on the Region's short list. One site in East Gwillimbury and three are in Clarington, located at Courtice Road and Osbourne Road, south of Hwy. 401 between Bennett Road and South Service Road and south of Hwy. 401 between Courtice Road and Osbourne Road.

The preferred site, as identified by consultants, will be announced in September, after which site-specific studies are planned. Upon provincial approval of the EA, Durham senior staff say they could start building a facility in 2009 and have it operational by the time Michigan, where Durham's trash is currently shipped, closes its border to Ontario trash in 2010.

Residents will also have to wait until a vendor is selected to find out an estimate of the tax impact of an EFW facility.