

Health risks still burning topic

Newmarket

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Experts to discuss incineration and its effects on wellness during meeting in Newmarket Tuesday

By: Serena Willoughby

If you want to know more about health risks associated with a proposed incinerator in the region, consultants will answer your questions Tuesday in Newmarket.

Last month, a health and ecological risk assessment team outlined a worst-case scenario where commercial workers and toddlers in daycare would only 300 metres from an energy-to-waste facility.

The study concluded there would be little impact on their health or the environment.

The scope of the study was limited, however, since each of four proposed sites for the facility — one in East Gwillimbury and three in Clarington — has different characteristics.

The team did express concerns about exposure to dioxins and furans from the proposed \$250-million incinerator.

The toxic chemicals are found in small amounts in the environment and are known to have adverse health effects. The study suggested the incinerator could cause elevated levels of these chemicals.

"These are red flags and we're going to make sure we cover them," consultant Chris Ollson said, adding once a site is confirmed, the team could further rule out these concerns.

Meanwhile, Halton Regional Council has agreed to postpone further investigations into building its own energy-from-waste incinerator for at least five years.

With Halton moving away from incineration and York only committed to a 12-per-cent interest in the facility, Ed Candolini, from residents group Communities First questions why the region is still honouring the partnership with Durham.

"The Halton decision ... further justifies our position on this matter," Mr. Candolini said.

Communities First has a petition on its website opposing the Durham-York incinerator that has nearly 1,000 signatures.

East Gwillimbury's council has also stated it will not be a willing host for the incinerator, citing air quality concerns and the fact the only York Region option for the facility on Bales Road, is on the greenbelt.

Newmarket may also withdraw support for the facility. It will wait until September for results of a traffic study on the impact of trucks bringing waste through Newmarket to a possible site in East Gwillimbury.

The Durham-York study team will provide a recommendation in August or September on which of the four sites will be most suitable for the incinerator.

"Different groups have spoken for and against (the incinerator), and we'll continue to assess and move forward," said Vaughan Regional Councillor Mario Ferri, chairperson of York's solid waste committee.

The meeting takes place July 24 at 6:30 p.m. at the York Region Administrative Centre, 17250 Yonge St. in Newmarket.