

Editorial

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Trip to Europe a waste of tax dollars

* Few would argue the general rule that it's often necessary to spend money to make money. But news that the region doled out thousands of taxpayers' dollars so that 16 staff and politicians could travel to Europe to examine seven different energy-from-waste facilities should have citizens crying foul.

* The trip cost approximately \$192,000 (about \$12,000 per person). The region's commissioner of works Cliff Curtis, the region's chairman Roger Anderson, Oshawa councillor Nester Pidwerbecki, and the region's chief administrative officer Garry Cubitt were among the party that traveled on the eight-day trip through Europe hitting cities like Copenhagen, Stockholm and Amsterdam.

We do not dispute the necessity of sending over a contingent to explore first hand incinerators like the one proposed for Clarington. It makes sense to see how these facilities operate and the impact they have in order to make an informed decision about whether or not to support it. But given that we live in an era of video-conferencing and high tech communications that could have been exploited to save money, it appears irresponsible and excessive.

The region's chairman, Clarington's mayor and the region's head engineer should have sufficed but instead the taxpayers dollars were stretched beyond reasonableness so that 13 others could hop on board the "gravy train."

Considering that reducing costs of trucking our garbage to Michigan is one of the prime motivators for looking to burn garbage locally in an incinerator, Curtis' justification for the costly trip is unconvincing. He says: "We are prepared to spend a lot of money to see how it works" because "we're going to be spending a lot of money on this."

The trip funds came out of the environmental assessment portion of the regional budget. Surely the criterion for assessing health and environmental risks does not include inviting anyone with some relevant link to a whirlwind European trip.

It's possible that Durham won't even be named the site of the incinerator as there are three potential sites including two in Clarington, just east of Oshawa, and one in York Region.

Europe has hundreds of incinerators and the one that is proposed locally would generate electricity that could be sold to help pay for the \$200 million cost. The venture also has environmental merit, as it will also reduce significant truck emissions that the current alternative poses. Let's not use a possible waste-burning facility as a smokescreen for government's wasteful ways.