

3 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dumping on incineration

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**Re: Durham leads on trash incineration
Editorial, Aug. 7**

Even though today's incinerators are cleaner than in the past, the emissions still contain toxic nanoparticles that evade even the most modern pollution-control devices. And what isn't released into the atmosphere is leftover ash, which is an acidic toxic composite representing 30 per cent of the original bulk. It must be buried in a hazardous-waste site at added expense and danger to underground water.

When polyvinyl chloride is burned in any incinerator, some dioxin is produced and even tiny amounts act as hormone disrupters. And when plastics are burned, the greenhouse gases associated with manufacturing new plastics are double the emissions created in recycling plastic.

Incinerators distract from recycling, reuse, repair, recover and composting programs, since the used materials that burn most readily are those that are most easily recycled. Garbage is mistakenly left up to local politics when it should be within provincial, federal and international jurisdiction. Municipalities won't get to zero garbage without "extended producer responsibility" legislation from Ottawa and the provinces.

International protocols regulating product design are also part of the solution.

Frank de Jong, Leader, Green Party of Ontario, Toronto

Instead of being remarkably "clean" as you claim, incineration takes material that could mostly be reused, recycled and composted and turns it into toxic gas and toxic ash. It starves industries of essential materials, forcing them to buy virgin resources at great cost to themselves and the environment; it creates dioxins and furans, products so toxic that no level is considered safe for humans; and it produces greenhouse gases.

Incineration isn't a healthy, economical or sustainable way to get rid of waste. That's why the European Union, in February, changed its waste protocol to make diversion a priority.

If we want to solve our garbage woes, we need to start at waste generation. We need federal laws that reduce packaging, and extended legislation that makes manufacturers responsible for disposing of post-consumer goods. Then they will start designing with recycling in mind. We need to have good separation of organics, recyclables and hazardous waste in our homes and through municipal programs. Through these efforts, diversion rates of more than 80 per cent can be achieved.

Liz Benneian, Oakville

Rather than promoting the 3 Rs, you are irresponsibly endorsing a landfill in the sky. Burning garbage reduces solid waste by spreading that waste as gases in the air. Burning produces toxic emissions that will still get past any high-tech filtration system, and Ontario's spot-check environmental guidelines are too weak to ensure that a private company fulfills its promises.

The myth of "energy from waste" should also be dispelled. Garbage doesn't burn by itself, so natural gas is used as the primary fuel – meaning that the resulting electricity is costlier and dirtier than coal-fired electricity, and contributes more than its share of greenhouse gases.

You should ask why York Region has cut back its involvement in Durham's planned incinerator: It won't have enough garbage to feed the incinerator and would get penalized by the put-or-pay contract. York's largest municipality, Markham, has a successful "Mission Green" plan to divert 70 per cent of its waste to recycling.

Yes, Durham is leading, but in exactly the wrong direction.

Louis Bertrand, Bowmanville