

Councillor confident with proposed incinerator

European energy-from-waste tour sheds light on facilities

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By Erin Hatfield

UXBRIDGE -- Uxbridge's regional councillor returned from a recent European energy-from-waste (EFW) tour with fewer concerns about the health impacts of the facilities.

The Region wrapped up its European tour of EFW facilities on July 11. Councillor Howie Herrema said he examined a number of incinerator sites, some in rural areas, but some very close to living centres.

"One site we were at had a daycare across the road," he said. "In Europe there seems to be no health concerns with authorities we went with."

He added if residents were against the facilities, he didn't see any signs of protest from them.

"From a health standpoint, it got rid of a lot of concerns," he said. He added some of the smokestacks on the incinerators were 300 feet high, but "you couldn't see emissions."

The Region's chairman also learned from the experience. "It was interesting and enlightening," said Roger Anderson. "After talking to their health officials, I feel a little more comfortable and look forward to the site-specific evaluation we will do as we move the process forward."

Mr. Anderson was in Europe with a delegation of senior staff from the Region of Durham and Clarington, as well as Clarington Mayor Jim Abernethy, Whitby Mayor Pat Perkins and six Regional councillors. Durham, in conjunction with York Region, is in the midst of an environmental assessment of EFW as a means of dealing with garbage. The second trip to Europe to investigate different thermal treatment technologies focused on the environmental impacts of energy from waste.

Mr. Anderson said they learned that 30 Swedish plants combined had emissions of less than one gram in 2005 and the biggest concern among residents was truck traffic to and from the plants.

Cliff Curtis, the Region's commissioner of works, said he feels the trip was valuable for all participants, especially those from Clarington, who got to see an array of plants in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and Italy and the surrounding land uses.

They took advantage of meetings with public health officials to ask questions about health concerns brought up by residents at the Region's recent series of public meetings about EFW.

"Based on what we saw in Europe, I think we are headed down the right path," Mr. Curtis said. "They used the best technology and what we would use here would be comparable."

Now the Region will continue with siting a potential facility and will put out a "request for qualifications" to narrow the field of possible providers. Once that is completed, the Region will evaluate site-specific health impacts. Plans could see an EFW facility operating in either York or Clarington by 2010.

Coun. Herrema said, aside from steam-generated energy, some of the Europe facilities are also used to heat buildings, the latter which Durham's plan does not include.

"We're a little behind (in that)," he said. "If it's deemed viable we'll maybe start with the industrial park (in Clarington)."

-- with files from Jeff Hayward