

The Oshawa Express

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Residents attended a local forum hosted by the CAW D.R.E.C to find out more and ask questions about the possibility of an Energy from Waste facility in Durham Region. INSET: Dave Renaud, president of CAW D.R.E.C speaks to the group.



Incinerator dangers still unanswered

Fear of incineration raises question at CAW forum

By Courtney Duffett

The Oshawa Express

A local forum that delved into the possibility of an incinerator being built just east of Oshawa had area residents questioning whether such a waste management strategy makes any sense.

Some called for a massive mindset shift surrounding the issue of waste management that would trash the incinerator concept and instead aim for a strategy of zero waste. That's directly at odds with regional council's decision to establish an Energy from Waste facility that must be fed an endless stream of garbage in order to produce energy.

D u r h a m Regional Council is expected to vote on the proposed Clarington facility today at council, after the region's Works Committee voted in favour of the incinerator last week.

Local and regional councillor John Neal says he could not predict how council will vote today but he sensed citizens' concerns with the notion of a multi-million dollar incinerator as an answer to the problem of what to do with the region's waste.

"I think the residents are worried," said Neal. "There's a lot of money going into this and we still need more information."

More than 200 residents attended the local public forum to discuss the pros and cons of a proposed incinerator in Durham Region.

Hosted by the CAW Durham Regional Environmental Council (D.R.E.C.) in Oshawa last week it gave citizens the opportunity to hear guest speakers discuss the proposed Energy from Waste facility.

"The only way things are going to change is if the public citizens question it," said Dave Renaud, president of CAW D.R.E.C.

The forum consisted of three guest speakers: Dr. Paul Connett, a graduate of Cambridge University with a Ph.D. in chemistry who has about 23 years of waste management research experience; Rod Muir, waste diversion campaigner for the Sierra Club of Canada whose focus is on the challenge of residual solid waste and Claudia Marsales, manager of waste management in Markham.

Marsales said since starting their Mission Green program in 2004, Markham has been able to achieve a 70 per cent diversion rate. Their target is 75 per cent and Marsales expects to reach that target within the next two years.

"It's what's possible here," said Marsales. "All the emphasis should be on diversion. With proper programs and education, about 90 per cent of the waste handled in our homes can be recycled. There needs to be a de-emphasis on garbage and make it unacceptable."

In order to make the Mission Green program successful and help move Markham towards zero waste, Marsales said a lot of the success is from the residents being tuned into all the good aspects of recycling and how important it is.

"(Durham Region) can't take its eye off the goal and rest at a 65 per cent diversion rate," said Marsales. "You have to keep your eye on all the opportunities and dig into the 35 per cent of what's left."

Connett specialized in environmental chemistry and toxicology and has been researching waste management for about 23 years.

He spoke to residents about the threat of incinerators and how Durham can be moving towards zero waste.

Connett said that the Region's recycling efforts have been successful over the last couple of years and has been a blueprint for the rest of North America on how to move towards zero waste.

"And now you're going to shoot yourself in the foot and spend (millions of dollars) on this incinerator," said Connett. "That's why these meetings are important, because taxpayers are going to be paying a huge amount of money to head towards a dead end."

Connett said some politicians are driven to support an incinerator because of two main "drivers" or benefits. They suggest it removes the need for landfills and eliminates the need to export waste. However, Connett said that with an incinerator, ash is created and so there would need to be a landfill to store the ash, or it will have to be exported out of the Region to be stored elsewhere.

"They'll have to break one of the drivers to make it work," said Connett.

Both Connett and Muir agree that what comes out of an incinerator is a health concern.

"What people don't understand is what's still in it," said Muir, adding that things such as recyclable materials, organics, and toxic materials like mercury thermometers and batteries could be used to fuel an incinerator. "It's a toxic brew," said Muir, adding that there is so much more we can do and diverting waste is the easy one.

"I believe there is a better way to deal with waste," said Renaud. "And it would be more effective to prevent waste, than to have to manage it."