

Province looking at energy from waste, too

Sat Feb 23, 2008

By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- Like Durham, the Province is looking at energy-from-waste.

While Durham is on a path toward incineration, the Province is looking into two relatively new energy-from-waste technologies: plasma gasification and methane capture from landfill.

And, if there's valuable information to be gleaned from the studies, perhaps Durham should wait for it before building a mass burn incinerator, said a Clarington local councillor.

The Province has posted a request for proposals, looking for studies into the environmental impacts of the two technologies, with an eye to determining which causes the least damage to the environment.

Plasma gasification heats gasses to extremely high temperatures to vapourize garbage and produce power.

Methane capture allows the harmful gas, produced by traditional landfill and released into the atmosphere, to be collected and used for production of power.

Durham has only one active landfill and a regional resolution against developing new ones.

Plasma gasification is something the Region looked at, said Cliff Curtis, Durham's Commissioner of Works. But that particular technology has yet to be proven on a large scale, he said. Plasco, an Ottawa company developing the technology, was invited to bid on Durham's proposed incinerator but could not meet the requirement of having operated at a large scale for a year or more.

Methane capture from landfill is not a terribly efficient way of keeping harmful methane out of the environment, said Mr. Curtis. Numbers he's seen indicate the technology is only capturing about 50 per cent of the methane produced by landfills.

"Methane is a very bad greenhouse gas -- worse than carbon," he said.

The provincial study will help inform municipalities on future options for solid waste management, said Minnie deJong, manager of the Ministry of Environment's human toxicology and air standards division.

Choosing those two types of EFW processes for study, "is not to say we're particularly promoting any sort of system," Ms. deJong said.

It could be worth waiting to see what the provincial study turns up before building our own mass burn incinerator, said Clarington local councillor Adrian Foster, who said he's particularly interested in finding out more about plasma gasification.

"I could swallow that a lot more easily than a humongous mass-burn facility," Mr. Foster said, noting the plasma model tends to bring with it a much smaller physical footprint.

"If we need to do thermal treatment, certainly, the plasma interests me greatly," he said.