

Dump tour trashed

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\$21Gs trip called 'political charade'

By **DON PEAT, SUN MEDIA**

A dozen Durham Region politicians are preparing to head to Halifax with five staff members in tow for a three-day taxpayer-funded tour of a garbage dump.

The trip to Otter Lake Stabilized Landfill is estimated to cost \$21,000 for flight, hotel and meals. It's a little closer to home than two jaunts to Europe in the last two summers and a February trip to Burnaby, B.C., all fact-finding missions as the region explores building a garbage incinerator.

"These trips are literally political charades to give the impression they've done their homework," regional Councillor Brian Nicholson charged yesterday.

The incinerator opponent stressed he's not against the principle of fact-finding trips but says the Halifax trip serves no purpose now that the environmental assessment is under way for an energy-from-waste facility.

NOT GOING

Not surprisingly, he's not going down east.

"I don't think it's appropriate for me to use taxpayers' money to support a trip which isn't going to gather any information that's helpful to me in my decision," Nicholson said.

The Oshawa deputy mayor has long been critical of the council's trips to Europe that he says cost \$120,000 each year. "I don't want to go on the grand tour and look at better burners," he said.

NO MEETINGS

In May 2006, five politicians and two staff members went to Europe, stopping in Copenhagen, Denmark, Malmo, Sweden, and Amsterdam, Netherlands. The next summer, they travelled back to Sweden and Denmark with stops in Germany and Italy.

"This was a tour of incinerators," Nicholson said. "They didn't set up meetings to talk to health officers or environmental lobby groups, they weren't willing to look at the other part of equation.

"They've made up their mind, they're going to try to push through a mass burner," he added.

Works chairman and regional Councillor Charlie Trim says he is going to Halifax and it's important to see landfill options as a back-up plan in case the incinerator project doesn't materialize.

Deborah Story, spokesman for Halifax Regional Municipality, said Otter Lake is a "leading-edge" facility that has received international recognition.