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Burning trash no money maker

By Jeff Nagel - Surrey North Delta Leader - July 09, 2008

Metro Vancouver's existing garbage incinerator in Burnaby may generate steam and electricity, but it still loses millions of dollars every year.

The waste-to-energy plant earned \$11.7 million from the energy it produced last year, according to a financial report.

But that's \$9 million short of the combined operating and debt costs, which totalled \$20.8 million.

The net cost of burning waste there was \$31.66 per tonne last year – still lower than the cost to the region of dumping garbage at the Cache Creek landfill.

The waste-to-energy plant handled nearly 290,000 tonnes last year, about 20 per cent of the region's total waste.

Metro Vancouver intends to build three to six new waste-to-energy plants it promises will use advanced new technologies that produce few emissions.

More than 600,000 additional tonnes per year of waste would be handled by the new plants, taking over from the region's Cache Creek landfill that will close in 2010.

The new plants may prove more efficient and come closer to break even, but Metro Vancouver waste management committee chair Marvin Hunt says it's too early to tell.

"It all depends on what technology we come up with and what the end products are," he said.

The Burnaby incinerator's finances are still improving – its annual debt costs of \$4 million are dropping each year and will eventually be paid off.

And Hunt noted it may still be able to make better use of high-pressure steam, increasing its revenue.

Turning the waste into energy here would eliminate emissions from trucks that now haul to Cache Creek and reduce landfill methane emissions, a contributor to climate change.

Metro Vancouver planners estimate the new waste-to-energy plants would result in a net decrease in greenhouse gas emissions of 340,000 tonnes per year and generate a quarter the particulate emissions of trucking to landfills.

But opponents of the plan fear any additional emissions in the Lower Mainland will hurt the airshed, particularly in the Fraser Valley. They contend there are better ways of using garbage as a resource.

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