

Incinerator bids sought in Durham

Requests for proposals to be issued to 5 companies on short list to build garbage-burning facility

August 20, 2008

MOIRA WELSH
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

Durham Region's controversial debate over garbage disposal is moving one step closer to incineration.

The municipality's request for proposals for a mass-burn incinerator is to be issued this Friday to five shortlisted companies – setting out detailed plans for the first incinerator in the Toronto region since Peel Region's Algonquin Power facility opened in 1992.

The struggle to find a homegrown solution for the disposal of household garbage is a huge issue – and a controversial one – for councils across the greater Toronto region.

To some, the word incinerator conjures images of dirty smokestacks. To others, new technology has turned it into a cleaner solution than trucking trash to a landfill hours from where it originated.

Toronto sends 75 garbage trucks each day to a Michigan landfill. State legislators, threatening to close the borders to imported garbage from Toronto, Durham and York Region, reached an agreement to end their shipping in 2010.

Toronto council, under Mayor David Miller opted to buy the \$220 million Green Lane landfill near London. Critics say the decision is bad for the environment (65 garbage trucks a day will travel down the 401) and short-sighted because, unless Toronto meets its ambitious target of 70% recycling by 2010, the site will be full in 16 years.

Faced with the same challenge, Durham Region politicians and staff toured European cities where emission standards are rigorous and incinerators are so integrated in communities that they are built with striking architectural designs.

But their plans to push for an incinerator were met with hard questions from local councils and protests from the public. Several councils voted against the proposal.

Regional chair Roger Anderson pushed forward. He and his staff, like commissioner of works Cliff Curtis, said the incinerator would have emissions lower than Ontario requirements, and standards set by the European Union.

"The vendors will be measured by yardsticks that will give them points not just for the price of their facility, but for the environmental impact," said Curtis.

The region's recycling programs would increase, he said, much like Peel Region where recycling has expanded despite the incinerator in Brampton that burns 165,000 tonnes of garbage every year.

Clive Ford sits on the Algonquin Power citizens liaison committee. "We don't have any problems with it. Its emissions are very low. We don't get complaints. A lot of people don't even know it is there."

The first government to push hard for an incinerator since Peel's was built, Durham – and to a lesser extent its partner, York Region – would burn 140,000 metric tonnes of mostly household garbage every

year, although an environmental assessment allows for 400,000 tonnes. (Durham would burn 110,000, and York 30,000 with an option to increase later.)

Among the requirements for proposed "mass burn" incinerator:

It will have two boilers, allowing for the use of the steam that is generated to heat nearby buildings.

It will generate 14 megawatts of electricity annually to be sold on the Ontario power grid. Negotiations are underway with the province on the payment for electricity. Anderson said he hopes it will be 11 cents per kilowatt.

Still, there are no guarantees an incinerator will ever be built.

The winning bidder will be chosen by early spring, and Durham council will vote on whether to go ahead with the project next June.

Phil Byer, a University of Toronto expert on waste, says both incineration and landfills have pros and cons, though proponents of each generally focus on the pros. But, he says the public is right to demand rigorous scrutiny of an incinerator.

"It has to meet the strictest standards in the world and be carefully operated and monitored," he said.

<http://www.thestar.com/printArticle/481883>