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## **Pellet factory's garbage-into-energy plan stalls**

### **No shortage of waste**

Nearly 2,000 tonnes of waste is piled up at Vaughan facility

**100,000 tonnes:** Amount of York Region household waste destined for Dongara's pellet plant each year.

**200,000 tonnes:** Amount of pelletized waste Dongara is allowed to produce each year.

**320,000 tonnes:** Waste produced by York Region each year.

**123 tonnes:** Amount of York Region waste to be processed by Dongara by Sept. 8.

**1,920 tonnes:** Amount of York Region waste processed by Dongara each week once its plant is fully operational in October.

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Nearly two thousand tonnes of pelletized garbage is piled up in giant storage domes in Vaughan.

But whether those pellets eventually will be burned, as originally intended, is still up in the air.

Last month, a \$50 million plant, the Dongara pellet factory, the first of its kind in North America, quietly started to transform garbage into pellets that can be burned to produce energy.

However, Dongara's owners are still awaiting permission for the pellets to be burned in Ontario. So far, 1,900 tonnes of pellets are stored at the plant, at the intersection of highways 407 and 427.

If approval is not granted, Dongara will have to absorb the added expense of shipping the pellets to jurisdictions in the U.S. that allow such material to be burned.

Whether incineration approval is granted depends to a large extent on the results of a three-day test burn done in a Leamington-area greenhouse last month by Renewable Energy Services.

Environment ministry spokesperson Kate Jordan said this week the company has until late September to submit results.

"We're still reviewing that application," Jordan said.

The test burn was allowed under provincial legislative changes made a year ago to streamline the approval process, bypassing a lengthy environmental assessment. The changes were meant to ease the burden for small-scale, alternative power sources.

If the test results are approved by the environment ministry, a provincial certificate of approval would be granted. That would open the door for greenhouses across Ontario to submit applications to burn pelletized garbage.

"The full results of the test burn need to be publicized and made available to the public for a review before the ministry of environment moves ahead with any decision for approval," Elaine MacDonald, a senior scientist with Ecojustice, said yesterday.

Ecojustice is one of several environmental groups that have expressed concern about burning waste in any form. MacDonald says tests for dioxins and other contaminants must be carefully monitored before any certificates are issued.

But Renewal Energy Services, even before the three-day test, applied to the ministry for a two-year extension of the test burn to allow the construction of three new gasifiers to incinerate 22 tonnes of garbage per day.

Despite the uncertainty in Ontario, Darren Soanes, chair of Dongara, said the firm already has two customers. Both plan to use the pellets in greenhouses in Ontario – if permission is granted – or in jurisdictions such as the United States.

"Yes, it's forthcoming," Soanes said confidently, about regulatory approval in Ontario.

Soanes said the only reason the pellets are still being stored in Vaughan – and not shipped – is because they aren't needed to heat greenhouses yet. He said the company has permission to store up to 7,000 tonnes of pelletized waste in Vaughan. When the plant is fully operational – by October – it will be able to process about 1,920 tonnes of garbage a week.

The venture could prove lucrative. It's estimated the firm would charge York Region more than \$9 million to pelletize 100,000 tonnes of the region's trash each year.

Another possible destination for Dongara products in Ontario is the Lafarge cement kiln in Bath, near Kingston, where Lafarge plans to burn tires, waste pellets and bone pellets to fuel a kiln.

But there, too, regulatory problems have caused delays.

Environmentalists concerned about possible side effects of such incineration convinced the Ontario Environmental Review Tribunal to hold a hearing, which Lafarge unsuccessfully tried to challenge at Ontario Divisional Court.

The hearing, supposed to be next month, was cancelled when Lafarge announced recently it would further challenge the need for a court hearing and would not take part in one held by the tribunal.

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