

Power plant opponents echo watchdog's concerns

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In such an environmental assessment the power plant proponent, in this case TransCanada, would hire a company to carry out an assessment of their proposed facility with this assessment then being reviewed by the Province.

Miller said other fossil-fuel based projects, such as coal-fired power plants, are treated differently and require a full environmental assessment.

In his report, Miller states that last year two applicants asked the Ministry of the Environment to revisit the rules governing environmental assessments for large natural gas power plants, arguing that a full environmental assessment should be required.

This request was turned down with the ministry noting there is always the possibility for the public to request a full environmental assessment.

However, Miller said, the ministry routinely turns down such requests.

While TransCanada spokesperson Chris Breen said he welcomed suggestions aimed at improving local confidence in the provincial environmental assessment process, he said a full environmental assessment would not really do anything that has not already been done in TransCanada's draft environmental review report.

"It is important to note that an individual environmental assessment for our clean energy project would not have produced a more robust environmental impact analysis. It would have only meant that the alternatives to our project (such as a nuclear power plant) would have been reviewed yet again. These alternatives have been considered at length over the years by the professionals who help the province plan and build a reliable energy system," said Breen.

"Instead, we have made concrete proposals to enable more scientific analysis and provided more time for the public to review and comment upon that analysis. In Oakville, we voluntarily more than doubled the length of time for public review of our environmental review report. Recognizing that local residents might want their own independent expert to review any potential environmental impact, we also offered to fully fund an expert of the Town's choosing. We have done the same for our safety analysis. These are more effective ways of enabling local residents to truly assess our potential impacts than revisiting alternatives

that were revisited several times already."

The TransCanada report, which was completed by SENES Consultants Limited for TransCanada, states the power plant will have little to no effect on the environment or the surrounding community during construction and operation.

The report, which is not subject to review by the Province, also states that residents near the plant will face no respiratory effects, no increased risk of cancer or other expected detriment to their health.

Town staff and council did not buy the claims in this report stating the Oakville Generating Station would result in an unacceptable risk to human health and safety.

Oakville Mayor Rob Burton, who continued to request a full environmental assessment after TransCanada presented its report said he is happy the Environmental Commissioner is now asking for one, too.

"Councillor Allan Elgar and I met with the Environmental Commissioner earlier this year to share our concerns about the weakness of the Province's process for siting power plants," said Burton.

The Oakville residents' association

Citizens for Clean Air (C4CA) echoed this satisfaction, C4CA chair Frank Clegg said his group had been calling for an independent environmental assessment for months.

Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn said he is optimistic Premier Dalton McGuinty will act on the Environmental Commissioner's recommendations.

"We have been a government that listens to reports like this and part of governing in a responsible way is to listen to all the advice," said Flynn. "It would be easy to ignore it, say, 'We know best,' or something like that, but that hasn't been the hallmark of this government. We tend to listen."

Flynn said he did bring the Oakville power plant issue to the attention of the Environment Commissioner last November.

At that time, Flynn said, the Environmental Commissioner was aware of the power plant issue, but not engaged in it.

"I was really pleased to see that after our visit he really did decide to pay some attention to the issue because I think whether you have a power plant in your own riding or not you kind of look at the issue and go, 'There really should be some rules around this,'" said Flynn.



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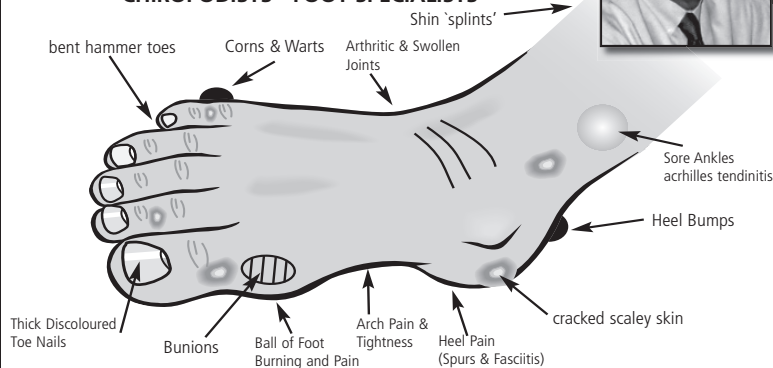
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