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Waste issue still touchy

By JULIAN REED, M.P.P.

Haltou-Burlington
The question of the disposal of liquid industrial wastes in Ontario continues to be controversial. In November, 1978, the minister of environment made a progress report to the Ontario Legislature on this question, which included a number of guidelines and recommendations. However, little progress has been made in this connection.

More than a month before the Minister's Progress Report, the Liberal Environment Critic, Murray Gaunt of Huron-Bruce, presented our position paper on the monitoring, treatment and disposal of liquid industrial waste to the Standing Committee on Resources Development.

Mr. Gaunt stated that having carefully reviewed the testimony of Ministry of Environment officials, our party believed that the issue of liquid waste had not been adequately researched. He pointed out that the legislative basis for an adequate waste control program had been in place for many years, but that this had not been implemented.

The position paper pointed out that the existing control program was based on a monitoring system fraught with guesswork and loopholes. It expressed dismay that the Minister had said that the province "may have to acquire one or more sites" for the treatment and disposal of toxic wastes when only one such facility was at that time in operation in the province, and that even that one had been threatened with closure.

We maintained that the Government could no longer prevail upon private industry, exclusively, to deal with the site selection, safe disposal, and treatment of hazardous wastes. Government is not in the business of insuring private investment in liquid industrial disposal technologies by waiting for these technologies to develop their own sources of private capital. Rather, government is in the business of insuring that the public is safe from dangerous chemical wastes.

Clearly what is needed is a partnership of government owned and privately operated sites. Such a policy would not obstruct private enterprise; it would facilitate their involvement. Private enterprise has tried to acquire sites and obtain permission to operate these sites through public hearings convened by government. These hearings have proven expensive and, of course, offer no guarantee of a successful outcome. Consequently, industry has backed off.

But government, which is also subject to environmental hearings, knows better what it will and won't accept by way of treatment and disposal sites and will be directly responsible for the operation of sites it owns and for the facilities it permits industry to operate on those sites. Therefore, in our view, a policy of a limited number of provincial sites would overcome the first hurdle to a meaningful waste control program.

But that is just the beginning. The waste disposal industry must be assured that it will be supplied with enough wastes to make treatment and disposal economically viable. It must also be assured that new disposal and treatment technology will not quickly force the users of older technology out of business.

On the first point, Liberal policy would ensure a waste market by calling for: (a) increased fines of a minimum of \$25,000 and or one year in jail for illegal dumping of hazardous materials, and for failure to report spills; (b) a fine of not less than \$25,000 for the inclusion of fraudulent information on a Ministry way-bill certificate. Both of these recommendations presuppose that the current system for inclusion of information on the present way-bill certificate be revamped. The Ministry must catalogue wastes and assign a code to each waste product. This code would be entered on the way-bill by the company producing the waste product.

Waste oils from service stations and similar sources could continue to be exempted from the way-bill system provided that the disincentives to dump illegally, or to fail to report spills, are in place. Where spills occur at such exempted sources, testing would commence immediately and the material contained until the analysis has been completed.

On the second point of new technology for the treatment of wastes, government must be prepared, though tax incentives and depreciation allowances, to encourage site operators, where necessary, to use new technology as it develops.

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