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Hazardous waste problem a growing concern

By LESLIE DANIELS
Herald Special

Three years ago I toured hazardous waste facilities in western Germany and Sweden with some other residents of Niagara region. The purpose of the trip, which was sponsored by the Ontario Waste Management Corporation (OWMC), was to see the kinds of technologies being used in those countries to manage hazardous wastes.

We were especially interested in the German facilities, particularly the incineration plant at Biebesheim near Frankfurt. The Biebesheim incinerator is the model for the rotary kiln incinerator proposed for OWMC's state-of-the-art hazardous waste facility. If OWMC's proposal is approved - it's now being reviewed at a public hearing - the people hired to run the facility will probably be sent to Biebesheim for hands-on training.

Having seen German facilities in operation, I'm convinced that we in Ontario have a lot to learn from them about how to manage our hazardous wastes.

The Germans have had hazardous waste facilities for more than 20 years. They have developed highly effective technologies to deal with their hazardous wastes without harming either the environment or human health. Most of the facilities I visited are situated fairly close to residential areas. Some of them are surrounded by farmland. Yet there is no evidence that hazardous waste facilities are having a detrimental effect on human health or the marketing of locally grown produce.

In Germany today, you would have a hard time finding people who disagree with the need for waste treatment and disposal facilities. Even the Green Party - the most radical environmental group in Europe - recognizes that waste reduction, while important, cannot be a substitute for safe treatment and disposal.

We did notice several dif-

ferences between the German facilities and the one being proposed for Ontario. Because of the scarcity of available land, the Germans have had to locate facilities wherever they could find a suitable site. They have not

been able to carry out a long, in-depth search for the best possible location, as we have been able to do in Ontario. (OWMC is proposing to build its facility near Smithville in the Niagara region).

But the most fundamental difference is in attitudes. While there is some local opposition to new facilities in Germany, they are generally more inclined to view the problem of hazardous wastes as one which is shared by

the whole society. And they are more willing to use their technology to help solve it. Isn't it time we did the same?

Leslie Daniels is communications co-ordinator for OWMC's Smithville office.



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