

Committee puts proposed EFW on backburner

Recommendation made to push back project for five years

By Melanie Hennessey
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Local environmentalists were all smiles Wednesday after a regional committee unanimously supported taking the controversial energy-from-waste (EFW) proposal off the table — at least for now.

After hearing from the residents largely concerned with the negative health and environmental impacts the facility could have, the planning and public works committee endorsed a motion that says the Region won't become the proponent for EFW now, but rather five years down the road.

It also calls for staff to work with other area municipalities and the Province to develop and implement effective waste reduction and diversion initiatives that promote environmental sustainability.

The resolution is along the same lines as one suggested by Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources (POWER), which appeared before the committee to urge councillors to rethink going ahead with the EFW concept.

EFW not the answer

Barbara Halsall of POWER emphasized incinerators destroy materials that must then be replaced, in turn producing more waste.

"If I burn a piece of paper instead of recycling it, someone has to manufacture a new piece of paper from raw materials," she said. "This is tremendously wasteful because manufacturing one tonne of paper creates 98 tonnes of waste products."

Meanwhile, Oakvillegreen president Liz Benneian said the health impacts the EFW facility would have need to be given serious consideration.

"We believe incineration poses a serious risk to public health," she said, noting there's no safe limit for the dangerous chemicals that would be emitted.

She also said it would place an unacceptable burden on the environment.

"If we are going to get serious about global warming, we must get serious about emissions," she said.

Burlington resident Tom Muir also touched on the issue of environmental and health effects, noting that provincial guidelines are either factually obsolete or don't exist for many chemicals that would be released.

"Therefore, the Region cannot protect the health of residents using these guidelines," he said. "People are already sickened and killed by pollution and this facility, unless it doesn't have to exhale, will just make things worse."

For Gillian Earle of Milntongreen, the EFW would be a

"step backwards" when it comes to dealing with waste.

"Let's focus on recycling and composting waste — not burning it," she said. "Let's focus on reducing greenhouse gases and pollution levels, not increasing them with an EFW facility."

Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal and a peer review of the business case also expressed worries about the environmental and health impacts the EFW facility could have.

"The direct emissions are significant and that's one of the key issues we have concerns with," Dr. Nosal said.

The business case found that compared to the current method of landfilling, an EFW facility would emit a much greater volume of air pollutants associated with smog and more greenhouse gases.

EFW would also emit small quantities of heavy metals

like mercury and organic chemicals such as dioxins, while landfilling doesn't.

The study looked at a variety of options for the facility, ranging from one that would accommodate 100,000 tonnes of waste per year from Halton residents only to one that could fit 1.2 million tonnes per year from local residents, businesses, biosolids and other municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Based on the wide range of tonnes, the capital cost of the plant could be anywhere from \$112 million to \$690 million.

The cost to taxpayers was also considered. While having garbage, recycling and Greencart pick-up would cost the average taxpayer (based on a \$300,000 assessment) about \$135 a year, adding an EFW facility to the mix would push that figure up to \$178.

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