

# Hydro health debate renewed

BY CHRIS TRABER  
Staff Writer

With only two years before hydro transmission capacity is doubled through York Region, no one, it seems, can conclusively confirm if power lines are a health hazard.

The debate on the potential risks of electromagnetic fields, known as EMF, has been renewed in York since Hydro One announced it will increase the capacity of the region's 24-kilometre hydro corridor by fall 2005.

From the Parkway transformer station in Markham to the Armitage station in Newmarket, maximum voltage will be boosted from 115kV to 230kV, the existing 24-metre tall towers will be replaced by 41-metre structures and the distance between towers will be reduced from the current 366 metres to 244 metres.

Opponents claim the ramped-up corridor threatens health and property values. Hydro One officials contend if the lines are not upgraded, there will be intermittent blackouts.

Central to the wrangle is EMF.

EMFs are produced by computers, electric razors, hair dryers, radios, cell phones and, of course, electricity transmission lines.

The medical and scientific communities have varying opinions on them.

Hydro One asked the region's public health department to provide a health perspective on the issue.

In response, medical officer of health Dr. Helena Jaczek asked Hydro One for information on the impact of construction of new towers at the edge of the hydro corridor.

"We did not receive a response. In fact, we have, to date, not been involved directly because we don't have specifics," Dr. Jaczek said.

Regulation of EMF is under federal jurisdiction and the feds have not established human exposure limits to EMF from electricity transmission lines, she said.

World Health Organization studies have linked EMF to childhood leukemia but it isn't proven.

They state that there was an above average incidence of leukemia in children and did relate it (exposure) to a specific dose. It seems that the last place you want to put high voltage transmission lines is in a residential area," Dr. Jaczek said.

The York health department doesn't have the capacity to do its own research, she noted.

"But we can read what is out there," she said. "What we are doing is trying to find out more about the environmental assessment that the

province will require Hydro One to go through and see whether the dosage at the edge of the corridor is safe. We hope that the assessment indicates that dosages will be well below the levels that cause illness."

Peter Gregg, Hydro One's vice-president of corporate communications, said his organization is an electricity provider, not a health facility.

"We're not the health authority and we don't get into health research on EMF," he said.

Hydro One recently held an open meeting in York with regional officials and concerned citizens. Oncologists and cancer experts from Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children and the United States gave expert opinion.

"The evidence indicates that the experts don't believe EMF is a health issue," Mr. Gregg said. "Our readings on the edge of power line right-of-ways indicate that the EMF levels are the same as those you'd find in your own kitchen or living room."

*It seems that the last place you want to put high voltage transmission lines is in a residential area.*

Currents from appliances and power lines can induce weak electric currents to flow through the body. Health Canada stated. These currents are much smaller than those produced by your own brain, nerves and heart and are not associated with any known health risks.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer classified EMF as "possibly carcinogenic," based on studies of childhood cancer.

But the evidence is not strong enough to conclude EMFs definitely cause cancer in children, according to Health Canada.

Magda Havas, an environmental resources studies professor at Trent University, said numerous reports show prolonged exposure to an EMF stronger than two milligauss, a unit of magnetic induction measurement, can increase the incidence of childhood leukemia. An EMF between 10 and 16 milligauss can speed the growth of cancer cells and cause miscarriages.

Health Canada guidelines are outdated, Dr. Havas said, adding she has measured EMF levels along the existing corridor and found some areas exceed two milligauss.

A recent U.K. study found children younger than 15 living within 100 metres of high voltage power lines have close to twice the risk of developing leukemia.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Andrew Fockler of Stouffville is the Markham Fair's first male ambassador. He will be joined by Holly Norris (left) and Amanda Davidson at the fair, which runs to Sunday.

# Ambassador gets new chain

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has many duties, including bringing greetings to guests, helping in answering guests' questions and participating in awards ceremonies. The ambassadors, over the past several years, have enjoyed the advantages they receive in this role."

Mr. Fockler is the son of Sylvia and John Fockler of Whitchurch-Stouffville. He was the president of the Stouffville District Secondary School student council from 2001 to 2003.

"Andrew has been given the honour of wearing the new chain of office donated by the Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Foundation," Mrs. Seeley said.

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