

YORK KEEN TO HOST TRASH PELLET PLANT

Scheme to make alternative fuel from garbage would be first in Canada

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

York Region's great hope to stop sending household trash to Michigan in the next few years is a hard brown, mottled cylinder two inches long. That's what garbage looks like when drained of all moisture, shredded, mixed with "high heating value" material so it will burn and then pulverized into a pellet cement factories can use as fuel.

And Mayor Michael Di Biase said his council supports the proposal and wants to bring the pellet plant in an industrial area between Hwy. 7 and Steeles Avenue.

"It's good, it's clean and I support it," he added. "I don't see why the region would not embrace it and move forward with it."

It's a plan untested in Canada but Borealis, an investment arm of a municipal employees pension fund, has Vaughan eager to host a pellet factory and York Region ready to sign a contract next June — provided Ontario's Environment Ministry approves the factory and the new "alternative fuel," some environmentalists call dangerous.

Waste pellets will help York's municipalities reach their 60-per-cent diversion targets and cut coal use in cement factories, said Betty Disero of MCW Light Heat Cool Ltd., consultants for Borealis.

Turning garbage into pellets has never been done in Canada but Borealis, through a company called Don-gara Developments, originally wanted to go a step further by proposing a Toronto plant to heat pellets at high temperatures in a process called gasification, drawing out useful gases and leaving a glassy material behind.

As head of Toronto's waste management committee, Ms Disero recommended the city find a process to make energy from waste.

After leaving city council, she started a consulting career with MCW and approached Toronto and Niagara Region with plans for gasification, which the firm argues is not incineration because no combustion is involved.

'Our lungs become the landfill'

MCW, however, has since changed its approach, shelving gasification for the short term and proposing a pellet plant in York that can handle around 110,000 tonnes, far less than the amount Ms Disero says a gasification plant needs to be profitable.

"We're trying to get the GTA municipalities to make pellets as a first step and look down the road as technology changes again to make fuel from garbage," she said.

Garbage arriving at the plant would be sorted to remove recyclables, stones, rubble and hazardous waste. In 18 hours, the pellets could be shipped to cement factories, which burn 600,000 tonnes of coal a year in Ontario.

Ms Disero said, adding leftover ash from pellets would be used in cement.

"The heat in a cement factory kiln is almost the same heat as the sun. It is so strong," she explained.

The pellets burn cleaner than coal, according to MCW's physical comparison of "typical coal" and a "typical pellet". Pellets appear to have lower levels of lead, sulphur, cadmium and other harmful materials than coal, she said.

But Gord Perks, spokesperson for the Toronto Environmental Alliance, said there's no reliable data to support MCW's "cleaner burning" claim and argues burning trash pellets will create highly toxic dioxins and furans.

MCW is merely "the latest in a long line of guys trying to promote pelletization", which is incineration by another name and each place where pellets are burned would be a waste disposal site, he said.

"Our lungs become the landfill," MCW representatives met with ministry officials last week to discuss their plans, but a ministry spokesperson said the company has not filed a formal proposal. The region, however, expects this to happen this month.

Mr. Di Biase, however, said he told York Region chairperson Bill Fisch and the region's waste management committee the city will take the plant on condition it takes Vaughan's curbside garbage first, saving its taxpayers the cost of trucking it to a transfer station somewhere else.

That condition is apparently news to committee chairperson Danny Wheeler.

"The company wants volume from the entire region, not just one municipality. Vaughan would be just as welcome as anyone else," the Georgina councillor says.

The region must wait for the ministry's final word on pelletization and the use of pellets in kilns, which Mr.



BETTY DISERO: Former Toronto councillor now promoting scheme to turn trash into pellets to fuel cement kilns.

Greenbelt plan popular, survey says

Environmental group claims widespread support

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

Poll results this week are "a powerful message from Ontarians" the provincial government should stand firm on the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt, the advocacy group Environmental Defence says.

A survey for the group suggests 81 per cent of Ontario residents support the province's greenbelt plan and only 7 per cent oppose it.

Told the plan will protect one million acres of farms and greenspaces from Niagara Falls to Rice Lake near Peterborough, 7 per cent thought that amount too much while 35 per cent said the greenbelt would protect too little.

"Ontarians support this greenspace protection approach and they want to see more of it," concluded Rick Smith, Environmental Defence's executive director.

"They're tired of sprawl, smog and gridlock and see the greenbelt as a real chance to protect the environment and improve our quality of life."

Of the 795 adults surveyed across the province between Nov. 12 and 17 by OraclePoll:

- 64 per cent agreed the building of new subdivisions on farmland and green space in the GTA "is out of control" while 9 per cent disagree;

- 81 per cent agreed rush hour traffic congestion in the GTA "is out of control";

- 86 per cent agreed "it is important to protect the fertile farmland" in the GTA;

- 69 per cent said the next generation of Ontarians will consider the greenbelt — which in York Region would include the Oak Ridges Moraine, as well as most land north of it along with valleys of the Rouge and Humber rivers

— a benefit while only 4 per cent thought it would be seen as a mistake;

- 74 per cent supported the development of more compact, transit-friendly neighbourhoods.

Although Environmental Defence rejects calls to compensate farmers for money they might receive by selling land to developers, most respondents did not. Told the governments of Mike Harris and Bill Davis did not compensate farmers when they formed protected areas on the Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine, 49 per cent supported compensation for greenbelt farmers while 24 per cent opposed it.

York Federation of Agriculture president Terry O'Connor, who met 50 farmers at Markham Fairgrounds to discuss the plan last week, said the greenbelt will result in less equity and retirement income for his members.

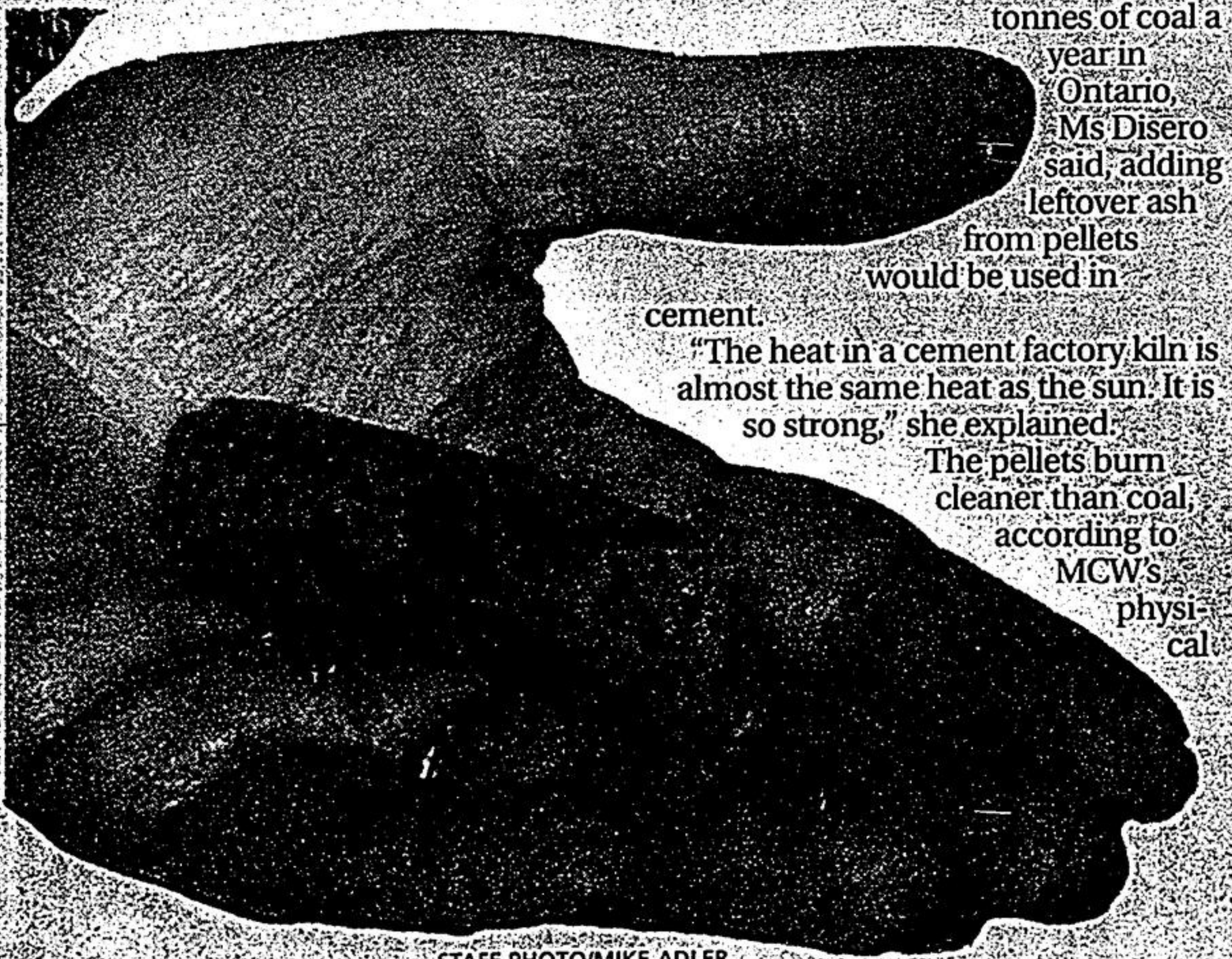
"You can preserve farmland but without some assistance, you'll never preserve farming," he told Municipal Affairs Minister John Gerretsen at a Toronto meeting this week.

"It may well be farmers need economic programs for support," Mr. Gerretsen said, but added this wasn't something his ministry was asked to consider.

A panel of provincial advisers last month ruled out compensating greenbelt farmers for "potential loss of land value" but recommended they receive "environmental payments" for stewardship of their lands.

Public meetings on the greenbelt continue until Dec. 2. The ministry encourages people to complete a survey on the plan by Dec. 12 at www.greenbelt.ontario.ca or by calling 1-866-220-2290.

Consultations this year produced an "overwhelming consensus we need to do something" about continuing losses of GTA farmland, wetlands and woodlots, ministry spokesperson Victor Doyle said this week.



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