

IS INCINERATING GARBAGE IN OUR FUTURE? POLITICIANS DECIDE TODAY



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

A garbage truck drops its waste on the floor of an incineration plant in Peel Region. Such a plant could be coming to York.

BURNING QUESTION

PRO

BY MARIO FERRI

The region's solid waste management committee adopted a resolution June 7 selecting thermal treatment — incineration or a similar technology — to manage waste that cannot be recycled or composted.

The resolution also called for recovery of energy from waste as part of the thermal process.

The resolution was put forward after months of study and public consultation, as part of a joint environmental assessment project with Durham Region.

York and Durham ship more than 350,000 tonnes of waste to landfills in Ontario and Michigan annually. This is a short-term solution that is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. By reducing, reusing and recycling, York and Durham have diverted about one-third of their waste from landfill. It's a good start, but it does not go far enough.

After public consultation sessions, it has become clear residents do not see landfills as a viable option and want to increase recycling efforts. As a result, York and Durham will push for a minimum standard of 60 per cent diversion by 2008 through increased reuse programs, blue box programs and green bin composting efforts.

These efforts were confirmed

recently by an Ipsos-Reid poll conducted as part of the waste study. In addition to enhancing landfill diversion, the polling showed 84 per cent of residents supported thermal technologies such as incineration, even if it meant locating a facility locally.

This support demonstrates a clear shift in our social mindset, from the economic convenience of landfilling garbage, to a more socially responsible, long-term and sustainable means of managing waste.

When incinerators first appeared in the 1970s, the technology was in its infancy. Emissions were too high and government standards were relatively lax. This is no longer the case.

Today, incinerators and other thermal technologies have extremely low emissions — far lower, in fact, than emissions produced by landfills. Additionally, the Ministry of the Environment has set strict emission standards, ensuring public health remains a paramount priority.

York Region and its partners are committed to an open dialogue with residents to ensure community and environmental needs are part of the waste management process.

If the recommendations of the Durham York Residual Waste Study are approved by both regional councils, public consultation sessions will be scheduled this fall to discuss site plans for a thermal treatment facility.

All of the documents, as well as the residual waste study timeline, are posted online at www.durham.yorkwaste.ca



MARIO FERRI: Incineration makes sense, politician says.

Regional politicians meet today to decide whether to accept a proposal to build an incineration facility to deal with your garbage.

Two experts — Regional Councillor Mario Ferri, chairperson of the region's solid waste management committee, and Gloria Marsh, president of the York Region Environmental Alliance, weigh in on the pros and cons of the debate.



GLORIA MARSH: Reduce, reuse better, environmentalist says.

CON

BY GLORIA MARSH

York Region, seeking a solution to our waste problem, by and large only came up with one option in all its many variations — incineration.

During a public meeting, a resident mentioned thinking "outside the box" is required. The alliance doesn't believe swapping landfill for incineration is doing that.

Selling incineration as a means of producing cleaner energy than coal also does not impress. Compare, instead, energy produced by incineration to energy produced by wind power and you get a much nastier picture.

The alliance maintains far too little has been done in the "reduce" part of the 3 Rs with regards to excess packaging of all kinds. It is mind boggling to think of how much garbage is generated by one food court in one shopping centre in one day.

Greenhouse gas emissions are just as harmful, if not more so, than smoking. It is a simple matter of a bylaw.

If we make a concerted effort to reduce, it will also cost us less by not having to deal with waste in the first place.

Although the region has put forward a commendable option for a diversion increase to 75 per cent,

we could easily reach 90 per cent if a concerted effort was put into finding imaginative solutions to deal with the garbage generated by apartment and high-rise condo buildings, shopping centres, businesses and institutions.

Anticipated greenhouse gas emissions from incinerator smoke stacks are said to be within provincial standards, but there has been no thought given to:

- the cumulative effect of at least four other proposed incinerators in southern Ontario;
- the impact of incineration on global warming or;
- the impact on human health.

We are well into our smog advisory days. The potential for such days year round once we have our smoke stack, with associated health problems, are very real, as is the impact of 15,500 tonnes of hazardous waste left after incineration that would need to be landfilled annually.

Keeping the incineration monster fed would discourage expanded recycling initiatives. And expanding our recycling to a 90 per cent goal is the only logical way to mitigate climate change and do away with the need for incinerators all together.

Lateral, rather than linear thinking will be required for this, but the health of our environment and our communities calls for creative problem solving regarding our garbage.

There has been no thought by the region put into any solution other than incineration.

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