

Former councillor wants warnings sent out, town plans open house

Town finally gets test results from Hwy. 48 landfill site

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

Three years of information on leaching at the old landfill site on Hwy. 48 and Bloomington Road wasn't made public — until now.

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville had to resort to the Freedom of Information Act to get reports from the Ministry of the Environment.

In the 2005 report, levels of sodium and chloride higher than that allowed by Ontario Drinking Water Standards were found at one test well on the eastern edge of the site, across from The Maples of Ballantrae golf course.

There were no elevated levels of chloride and sodium at the one residential well tested and these chemicals were found to be below the recommended levels in the regional aquifer.

However, these chemicals could be naturally occurring, Tom Parry, the town's director of development services, said, adding it may not necessarily be an indication of an impact from the landfill site.

He noted that some wells located a great distance from the former dumpsite have high sodium levels.

"That is something that needs more monitoring," Mr. Parry said.

GAS LEVELS HIGHER

The presence of vinyl chloride in the southwestern portion of the site has to be investigated further, the town's consultant Gartner Lee Limited concluded after reviewing the reports.

"That's to determine if it is going to be a problem or not," Mr. Parry said.

Methane gas levels were found to be somewhat higher along the western edge of the site, but the chemical plume travelling out of the landfill hasn't gone downward to any significant extent, according to the report.

The consultants also noted grading has recently been done on the site, clean fill has been added and 16 more landfill gas vents have been installed to reduce the landfill's impact on the environment.

It also recommended a risk assessment and contingency plan for impacts on groundwater and landfill gas around the site and that more be done to reduce landfill gas levels.

The dump was filled from about 1962 to the summer of 1985 and is located east of Hwy. 48 and north of Bloomington Road.

Monitoring for ground water, surface water and combustible gas has been done twice a year since the dump closed.

However, reports for 2003, 2004 and 2005 weren't sent to the town until the Freedom of Information Act was invoked.

Monitoring is done using 26 leachate wells, 36 monitoring wells, one residential well, four surface water monitoring locations and 22 landfill gas probes.

It's being done "to ensure there are no unacceptable impacts on human health or the environment related to chemicals originating from the closed landfill site," Mr. Parry noted in his report to council.

At a council meeting last month, one resident called for the town to inform new home buyers and existing residents of the dump's presence in the area.

A former councillor is concerned dumped chemicals, including vinyl chloride, could end up in the area's groundwater, eventually causing harm to people and animals.

"An estimated 55 million litres of chemical waste per month for 11 years was dumped in open pits," Jim Doble said. He was a councillor during the 1980s when protests against the dump made national news.

The waste came from plants and factories in Canada and the United States. No bills of lading were kept, Mr. Doble added. As the town grows and more water is being drawn from municipal wells, he fears leachate may be drawn from the site.

"The insidious buildup of these chemicals will take years or even decades to eventually cause the deaths of many people in this town," he told residents at a council meeting last month.

'SCARE TACTICS'

Mayor Sue Sherban called the comments "scare tactics."

Councillor Susanne Hilton said although the ministry's findings aren't startling, she wants to see an increase in monitoring and have a report from the landfill site every six months.

She put forward a resolution the ministry provide the town with a formal response to the consultant's recommendations by outlining its action plan, including preventative measures.

"Residents have the right to know about the safety of their drinking water," Mrs. Hilton said.

Mr. Parry is planning an open house in the new year to give more information to residents about the site.

If you want to check out the ministry reports, contact the town offices at 905-640-1900 or visit the Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library at 30 Burkholder St.



SUSANNE HILTON: Councillor says residents have a right to know about their drinking water.

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