

Six years later, Durham incinerator approved

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Keith Gilligan

DURHAM -- The final approval has been given for Durham Region's incinerator.

Following an all-day meeting Tuesday, Regional councillors voted 16-7 to approve the co-owners' agreement with York Region, paving the way for the start of construction on the controversial project this fall.

Durham and York regions began work on the project six years ago. Construction will take about three years, with the Courtice facility expected to open in September 2014.

Opponents of the project say incineration will pollute the air and harm the health of residents.

Chris Ollson, one of the consultants retained by the Region, said, "There's no increased health risk to families, business or farmers.

"You wouldn't see anybody getting sick based on the operation of this facility," Mr. Ollson added.

Dr. Ray Copes, director of environmental and occupational health for Public Health Ontario, was asked by Dr. Robert Kyle, the Region's medical officer of health, to review environmental reports prepared for Durham.

The incinerator's contribution to air pollution "will be very small," Dr. Copes said.

When asked if he would live near the facility, Dr. Copes said, "I would have no concern with the facility, per se. My decision to live in Clarington would be independent of this facility."

Incineration has a "stigma attached to it," Dr. Copes said. "The perception, I can understand that. On a risk basis, there are other things we do that are more of a risk."

Doug Anderson, president of DurhamCLEAR, an organization opposed to the incinerator, said his group has launched a lawsuit in an attempt to halt the project.

"The outcome of this meeting won't affect the legal action."

He criticized councillors who ran in the municipal election last fall opposing the incinerator, but haven't done so.

"You're turncoats and you sold out your constituents."

Incinerator opponent Wendy Bracken said Dr. Copes underestimated the number of deaths that would occur because of the incinerator. She stated he hadn't counted the cumulative effect of 30 years of incineration.

Rather than one extra death in one million people annually, there would be between three and 18 deaths a year, she said.

"Annual death rates should have been multiplied by a factor of 30," Ms. Bracken said. "There will be three to 18 more deaths than the one in a million deaths."

Proceeding with the project would be "unethical and a risk to residents," Ms. Bracken added.

"The Ontario regulatory requirement is one in a million. Dr. Copes says it would be less than the regulatory requirement. I says it's more than that."

The facility will cost \$272 million, with Durham's portion \$207 million.

Whitby Councillor Joe Drumm voted against the agreement, saying the Region could better spend the money on other initiatives.

"We have an aging infrastructure and our own OP (official plan) tells us we'll have thousands more residents in our communities. Can we really afford this \$207 million?" he asked.

Pickering Councillor Jennifer O'Connell had wanted to change the co-owners' agreement, so that York would have to help pay for enhanced environmental monitoring. However, her colleagues voted down her request.

Monitoring programs are still being drafted and need to be approved by the Ministry of the Environment.

If Durham wanted enhanced monitoring, under the co-owners' agreement, it would have to pick up the cost.

Oshawa Councillor John Neal opposed the agreement, saying, "I heard the Region's consultants and they haven't given me any assurances here. They're talking one death. Who would want to stand up here and say you want one death? One death is one too many."

Clarington Mayor Adrian Foster voted for the agreement.

"Do I like this thing? No. Do I want another smokestack on my waterfront? No," he said, adding councillors were told in-camera that stopping the project now would mean Durham would be on the hook for a large settlement with Covanta, the company selected to design, build and operate the facility.

"We know what those costs are and they are massive," Mayor Foster noted.