

Is DEEP development floating away?

Is the U.S. military launching a campaign that could liberate Dufferin County from solid-waste disposal problems that will reappear when the Green for Life (GFL) contract expires in seven years?

That question arises from a recent New York Times story that said the military is investing in an Energy from Waste (EFW) gasifier no larger than an average shower stall but capable of processing at least 25 tons of garbage daily.

It comes at a time when Dufferin County Council is faced by difficult financial decisions about the future of its waste management.

Public Works Director Scott Burns told the Community Development Committee (CDC) that the county had spent \$765,000 since 2005 pursuing alternatives to landfilling. There would be significant costs in continuing with requests for expressions of interest, qualifications, and proposals, he said.

Should Energy from Waste be desired, past County processes indicate that importation of waste is a crucial component of a sustainable and economically viable solution.

Technology has likely not progressed to a point to make a facility small enough to address Dufferin's waste needs viable from a cost perspective, Mr. Burns reported.

Meantime, provincial energy policies militate against purchasing electricity produced from garbage as, according to the province, garbage is not a renewable resource.

The shower-stall-size gasifier reported by The Times might solve Dufferin's capacity problems but the test-model purchased by the U.S. military carries a price tag of \$8-million.

The cost wouldn't appear to be a deterrent for the army, which isn't so much interested in electricity generation as in the production of fuel needed by front-line combat units.

The military is looking for ways to reduce its oil consumption, and to make it easier to supply the front lines with the fuel it uses in all its vehicles and generators. 'These days, the supply lines are in the battlefield,' said Sharon E. Burke, the assistant secretary of defense for operational efficiency plans and programs. 'And we consume a lot of fuel, which makes us a big target,' The Times reported.

Grand Valley resident Peter Turrell, an environmental expert and constant observer of waste systems among other things, isn't convinced that the small gasifier would be as efficient as it's touted to be.

I have their brochure here. They have never answered a request sent a while ago about locations to visit. At this time we consider the brochure to be waste porn as the drawing is not to scale - look at the size of a container and divide by 25 tons per day - does not say how they get the heat to start the process, except it is not plasma arc, and big red flag comment of mixing together any and all waste -- remember I said you need a steady temperature so how can you burn diapers, needles and lumber all at the same temperature?

MSW (municipal solid waste) has a lot of water in it and it just does not burn as good as plastic, Mr. Turrell said in an emailed response.

He said in an interview that no one had proposed a smaller gasifier for Dufferin as it would not have been economically viable; that there has to be an economy of scale.

Still, says The Times, Sierra Energy, has spent the last several years testing a waste-to-energy system called the FastOx Pathfinder.

The centerpiece, a waste gasifier that's about the size of a shower stall, is essentially a modified blast furnace. A chemical reaction inside the gasifier heats any kind of trash ? whether banana peels, used syringes, old iPods, even raw sewage ? to extreme temperatures without combustion. The output includes hydrogen and synthetic natural gas that can be burned to generate electricity or made into ethanol or diesel fuel.?

Aside from gasifiers as large as the Alt Energy one proposed for Dufferin for which there were no investors and one as small as the FastOx, what are the alternatives for the DEEP?

On composting, the county is still in a partnership of sorts with York Region, and Mr. Burns said that consultants would be scheduling a visit to DEEP as part of York's Functional Servicing Report.

?Southern Ontario Processing Facilities may have merchant capacity for addressing Dufferin's waste beyond the County's current 7-year contract with GFL.

?Preliminary discussions with the Region of Peel, however, have clarified that the proposed EfW facility will be constructed with merchant capacity to address only waste produced from sources within the Region, and will accept no external feedstock,? Mr. Burns reported.

The issues may be broached at the council's Sept. 12 meeting.

By Wes Keller