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Ottawa, June 30, 2011

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment does not seem to take air quality and public health seriously, judging by their fast-track approval of the first mass burn incinerator in over twenty years. "Ontario appears to be 'open to polluters'", says Linda Gasser, Durham resident and Prevent Cancer Now's Incineration Campaign Coordinator.

Less than three weeks after the public comment period on the applications closed June 9th, the Ministry of the Environment issued the Certificate of Approval for the Durham-York incinerator project.

"This was the beachhead the incinerator industry was looking for in Ontario", says Gasser. "I am also concerned that if Durham Region, the majority partner, decides to move forward with the incinerator, this could open up the floodgates for other incinerator projects across Canada", says Gasser. "These approvals could provide a template to the industry and as approved, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment has set the bar low".

As reported by local news media last week, 47 physicians in the host community of Clarington unanimously approved a letter to the Ministry of the Environment condemning the construction of the incinerator in Clarington. The letter has also been endorsed by groups such as the Nurse Practitioners Association of Ontario. <http://www.durhamregion.com/news/clarington/article/180053>

The Environmental Assessment (EA) and the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) applications confirmed that the Durham-York incinerator would emit tonnes of particulate matter, heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants including dioxins -a carcinogen- and respiratory irritants. EA studies also confirmed that the current air quality at the proposed site in Courtice is already poor.

One pollutant of major concern, fine particulate matter known as PM 2.5, was found to be just below the Canada Wide Standard. Ontario has no standard for PM2.5 which is known to be a "non-threshold" pollutant, meaning that there is no safe level of exposure.

The Ministry of Environment approval of the Durham-York incinerator allows for fine particulate matter PM2.5, to be emitted at more than twice the concentration that was assessed for human health risk in the EA. The certificates of approval applications did not include any medical studies of the risk to human health due to the additional emissions. Although the Ministry is revising its emission source testing code, the new version may not apply to the certificate for the Durham-York incinerator.

Though requested by the Municipality of Clarington in their comments to the Ministry, the Ministry did not require continuous monitoring of particulate matter. The recently revised A-7 Guideline for the operation and monitoring of incinerators in Ontario states that the Ministry encourages the use of high sensitivity continuous particulate matter monitoring over opacity monitoring since particulate emissions have a direct environmental impact.

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“Continuous monitoring would confirm compliance, or non-compliance, with the permit limits. Given the already high levels, it was especially important that particulate matter be monitored continuously” says Gasser, who has monitored the project since 2006. “The Ministry, and Durham and York Regions, should know that you can’t get an accurate representation of actual annual emissions, and associated health risks, by requiring the monitoring of particulate matter once a year and through a surrogate parameter such as opacity.”

The Certificate of Approval can be found at: <http://www.ebr.gov.on.ca/ERS-WEB-External/displaynoticecontent.do?noticeId=MTEzNjcw&statusId=MTcwMzEw&language=en>



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