

Despite naysayers, McGuinty wants Ont. to be world leader in burning garbage
CP Wire

Wed 28 Mar 2007

Section: Quebec-Ontario regional general news

Byline: BY MICHAEL OLIVEIRA

TORONTO (CP) _ Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty can envision a day when the world looks to his province for solutions on burning garbage _ even if environmental groups say it's nothing but a dirty, expensive technology.

The Ontario government is allowing municipalities to fast-track garbage-incineration pilot projects in the hopes of pushing the technology forward and one day cashing in on its success.

Burning garbage to create energy could be a solution to overloaded landfill sites and Ontario wants to be ahead of the pack in developing incineration technology, McGuinty said Wednesday.

He highlighted an existing test in Ottawa that turns garbage into a gas and said that could be the future.

``That gas, as it turns out, burns cleaner than natural gas, so it's better for the environment," McGuinty said.

``There are fewer greenhouse gases, fewer toxic emissions, so I think that's something we should be exploring."

He said he's willing to let the small pilot projects bypass some procedural hoops because the province has an opportunity to become a leader in incineration _ or it could get left behind.

``We could've said, 'Take two years, go through the whole rigmarole,' and you know what they would have said: `We're going to Austria,'" McGuinty said.

``We need to develop these kinds of technologies here."

Environmentalists said the premier should be focusing on recycling instead of burning garbage, which is expensive and can create more emissions than coal if not done properly.

``When you burn garbage, you're putting out 33 per cent more carbon dioxide than when you burn coal, and the United Nations environment program says that 60 per cent of the world's dioxins comes from burning garbage," said New Democrat critic Peter Tabuns.

``This premier is caught up with convenience in dealing with a problem and is not interested in sustainability or dealing with climate change."

A recent report on garbage incineration by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy warns against making it the key to a waste strategy, but doesn't discount the technology.

“There have been great advancements in the ability to filter out pollutants,” said report author Maureen Carter-Whitney.

“But we believe that waste management needs to be led not by technology, but by a strong comprehensive waste-management policy framework . . . and we're hoping it would reflect a strong emphasis on waste reduction and diversion.”

Conservative Leader John Tory, who campaigned for garbage incineration in Toronto during his failed run for mayor in 2003, said it's about time McGuinty embraced the technology.

“He's refused up until now to look at the latest technology and it's been improving every year since I first started advocating it years ago as one of the means _in addition to recycling and diversion _ of dealing with our waste problem,” Tory said.

But Sierra Legal lawyer and economist Anastasia Lintner said the province would be ill-advised to skip full environmental assessments if it wants to be a leader in incineration.

“With any new technology or incineration program we think the pilot projects require intense environmental scrutiny and (should) not be allowed to be fast-tracked or receive special treatment,” she said.

“Until they're proven to not have environmental impacts that are dangerous, they shouldn't be adopted on a broad basis.”

McGuinty wouldn't promise that new incinerators will be perfectly clean, but said they will all have to meet strict government regulations.

“What we're saying is they have to always respect our rigorous air quality standards. You cannot compromise that.”

Copyright © 2007 The Canadian Press