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City, MOE reviewing files on Campbellville dump site

'Red flags' raised: councillor

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The disposal of a large quantity of waste petroleum products near the proposed St. Marys quarry site in northeast Flamborough more than four decades ago has sounded additional alarm bells for opponents of the aggregate company's application for a Permit To Take Water (PTTW).

"It adds concern to the prospect of what is proposed," said Graham Flint, chair of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), a grassroots citizen's group that is opposed to plans for a quarry near the Flamborough/Milton border of Milborough Line at 11th Concession Road East. Last October, St. Marys applied for a PTTW in order to test a groundwater recirculation system designed to mitigate impacts on area groundwater if a quarry is approved.

St. Marys proposes to pump 12.7 million litres of water daily during the testing period. The company wants to pump at a rate of 8,800 litres per minute, well above Carlisle's municipal well average of 650 litres per minute.

The proposal raised red flags for Flamborough councillor Margaret McCarthy, who says she doesn't take much comfort from the Ministry of the Environment's (MOE's) warning to St. Marys that any impact resulting from the tests, if approved, will be the liability of the aggregate company. The same ministry would order the municipality to fix the water system for area residents if wells were to suddenly run dry during the testing, she said.

"This is a colossal issue," McCarthy stressed during a recent interview, adding that its effects would reach well beyond Hamilton's borders and "could have broad public policy implications throughout the country."

The confirmation that 280,000 litres of waste petroleum products were dumped on a Campbellville Road property 2.7 kilometres northwest of the proposed quarry site has awakened additional concerns about the pump test and its possible consequences. The products, said to contain chemicals such as benzene and toluene, were disposed of between October 1964 and May 1965 by being pumped into perforated metal tanks that allowed the waste to discharge into the surrounding soil. The tanks have since been removed from the property.

The MOE insists that the contamination has long since flowed into Lake Ontario. Paul Odom, the MOE official who will eventually rule on St. Marys PTTW application, said this week that the location of the groundwater trench designated for the pump test is 2.7 km from the former dumping area. In an e-mail to McCarthy last month, he wrote: "At this time, it is our conclusion that the source(s) of contamination on the...property were removed and that residual contamination has been reduced to levels below drinking water guidelines.

"Our assessment also indicates that the property is to the northwest and outside the capture zones of the Carlisle wells as depicted by your (the City of Hamilton's) source protection consultants."

Despite the MOE's assurances, city hydrogeologist David Kerr has some lingering doubts. In an e-mail to McCarthy, he acknowledged that, although he is inclined to agree with the ministry's assessment, he "cannot, with a high degree of certainty, rule out that there are no remaining organics in the ground on site or off site

that could potentially be mobilized from pump testing on the St. Marys property."

As a precaution, he has asked the ministry for the opportunity to review investigative reports and supporting documentation related to the cleanup and monitoring of the property. He has also requested that if the MOE grants approval for the pumping tests that sampling for organics be done at regular intervals during the testing and a system be put in place to cease the testing immediately if there is any indication of contaminant migration.

Odom said Kerr has already visited the local MOE office to look at the technical files. The ministry official said he is waiting for additional information from St. Marys before making a decision on the PTTW application. The application is "still with the (ministry's) technical reviewers," he said.

Flint said information about the former dumping site is "a new discovery" for members of FORCE.

"We don't know what was put into those tanks because it wasn't regulated," he said, noting that monitoring for hydrocarbons during the pump testing is a prudent measure.

John Moroz, vice-president and general manager of St. Marys CBM Aggregates, said he wasn't aware of the former dumping site's existence until the news surfaced in recent weeks.

"I don't have any more information about it. I'm certain the MOE and other agencies will take it into account if they are concerned about it," he said when asked what its discovery might mean to the PTTW application. "They're the ones to make that call."

"It's an extra layer to monitor," McCarthy said. Flint agrees.

"We don't know what else may be lurking around (in surrounding soils)," he said. "It's something we need to be concerned about. Maybe, it will come out of its steady state; it needs to be monitored."



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