



GREENWORKS



Spring 2009 Volume 3, Issue 1

Page 1



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR WHO BENEFITS FROM A CONSERVER SOCIETY?

The notion of a conserver economy goes back to the early '70s in Canada. It was concluded that many of our environmental problems are rooted in a society dedicated to consumption - which rapidly turns resources into garbage in the interest of short-term economic growth. Not much has changed since then.

Embracing the path of a sustainable, conserver society includes adopting a triple bottom line approach that ensures environmental, social and economic bottom lines are balanced, tracked and measured. The best possible decisions for the community result when these three bottom lines are considered together and when it is understood that what happens in one area will affect the others.

It is hard to imagine that the triple bottom line has been taken into consideration with the Region supporting and the Province hell bent on building an inefficient, polluting peaker facility on the Greenbelt, right in the midst of valuable farmland. With only 36% efficiency the remaining 64% - a toxic stew of noxious substances - will spew into the air, adding to our health problems, and denying some farmers a livelihood (social impact). Our water and soil will be contaminated (environmental impact). Our local food security will be compromised, with foreign produce imported from greater distances. Health care costs will rise (economic impact).

It is also hard to imagine that Vaughan council truly believes its own rhetoric when it rezones rural land to allow for 3,000 houses in an area currently protected from development.

So if the big guys aren't getting it, it falls to us to do our part, and a recession is the perfect time. We won't be buying new cars, changing houses or making large purchases as readily. Instead of throwing away, we will be fixing things. And the little guy will benefit - my mechanic, handyman, home renovation contractor and appliance repairman. Job retraining from automotive assembly to these vocations will decrease unemployment.

Last year during Earth Hour, I couldn't find the switch to turn off my outdoor lighting. I had a B&B guest at the time and she was quite supportive of me turning off all power for the entire house. Really getting into it, she went for a walk in my neighbourhood (Oak Ridges) to see how many people were participating. There were only three - all homes belonging to members of YREA I might add. WE HAVE TO DO BETTER THAN THAT. Turn off your lights and think about ways you can conserve this March 28th. In the words of Chief Seattle - All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth. When you become a conserver, the environment benefits, therefore you benefit.

Sincerely,

Gloria Marsh

In this issue

- Message From the Chair1
- Do You Know Where Your
Garbage Goes?2
- Earth Hour3
- How Green is Your Lake?.....4
- Organic Maple Syrup -
Bother?5
- On The Ground6
- YREA Planning For Action6
- Donor Thanks & Appeal.....7



DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR GARBAGE GOES?

By Leslie Atkinson, Executive Director, YREA



Recessions always cause a number of ripple effects and one that is currently impacting municipalities across North America is the shrinking market for recyclables. Experts in waste management say this was not unexpected as it was an issue during the last recession which resolved itself as the economy grew. The difference this time around is that there has been a boom in recycling and more

materials are now separated and collected with government relying on the revenue stream it provides.

York Region chose a waste management contingency plan during these times that diverts recyclables to the Dongara pelletization plant in Vaughan. At first this seemed like a temporary plan but recently councillors announced on CBC News that they fully expect that 100% of York Regions garbage will soon be sent to Dongara under a 20 year contract with them.

York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA) has had great concerns about the manufacturing of pellets from garbage currently done in Vaughan at the Dongara facility and the subsequent burning of the pellets in other locations.

The Region proudly touts this as an 'energy from waste' green program, as if this is a remarkable two-fold solution which diverts waste from landfills while at the same time addressing energy concerns. The

"In fact, even spokespeople from Dongara say the pellet is comparable to medium grade coal."

problem is that the pellets are not clean energy. In fact, even spokespeople from Dongara say the pellet is comparable to medium grade coal. It seems quite odd that while our provincial government is trying to shutdown coal plants, they allowed Dongara to bypass full environmental assessments to produce pellets that are equivalent to coal and include coke and rubber as additives to increase the burn rate. Not only is it adding to more unknown toxins

going into the air, it is adding more carbon emissions and contributing to climate change. A green solution? Not at all.

The Ministry of the Environment has granted St. Mary's Cement permission to test the burning of 'alternative fuels' as a time-limited research project. As research, this undertaking is exempt from the Environmental Assessment Act and the citizens of Bowmanville who live nearby, are the guinea pigs.

The problem is that the provincial government allows exemptions from full environmental assessment (EA) when there is a third party involved. Recently Lake Ontario Waterkeeper and other parties challenged approvals given to cement giant Lafarge to burn 'alternative fuels' which included pellets. Lafarge has withdrawn its application. What does this tell us? That burning plastics, tires, and other 'alternative fuels' and manufacturing pellets from garbage would not pass environmental scrutiny. Long-term effects of pelletization and the burning of pellets, plastics and tires must be studied.

In the meantime, Dongara and the Region of York should look at creating a cleaner pellet which can be used for purposes other than burning. Pelletization seems like a great process to compact trash. Surely those pellets could be put to a better, and environmentally safer purpose.

For more information about these issues visit www.waterkeeper.ca.



GREENWORKS



Spring 2009 Volume 3, Issue 1

Page 3

60 EARTH HOUR - SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 8:30 - 9:30 PM

by Karen Buckle, YREA Communications Coordinator



Earth Hour 2009 is coming up soon. Have you made your commitment yet to an hour of electricity-free living? During last year's event, Newmarket and Aurora topped Ontario's participant list conserving their energy by 14% and 10.2% respectively; significantly higher than the provincial average of 5% energy conserved. The lights-out campaign that began only three yrs ago in Sydney, Australia is about setting a global mandate for action on climate change. This year's goal is to have 1 billion participants from over 1000 cities worldwide. With six weeks still to go, organizers have already had twice as many cities sign up as last year! So far in Ontario, only the City of Toronto has officially made their commitment, but you can help by encouraging your municipality to sign up or by signing up individually or as an organisation at www.earthhour.org/signup/.

Not sure how to spend your hour of darkness? Try these ideas:

- Invite friends over, light candles, play board games and have fun!
- For families with children, try living like the pioneers would have before electricity. Plan to cook your dinner over open flame (i.e. a backyard fireplace or bbq), eat by candle-light, and sit around after dinner telling stories and playing old-fashioned games or singing songs.
- Organize a candlelight walk in your neighbourhood. As you and your neighbours pass houses with their lights on, encourage those people to switch off and join you on your stroll raising awareness to the rest of the neighbourhood.
- Go to a high spot in your municipality where there is a good view and take some photos of the city lights before, during and after the event.
- Borrow a friend's telescope and see the stars more clearly without all the usual light pollution.
- Check your municipality's website for local Earth Hour Events

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HOW GREEN IS YOUR LAKE?

By Sharon Bradley, Director, YREA & Chair, Oak Ridges Friends of the Environment

We all like to think of lakes and other bodies of water as crystal clear blue reflecting the beauty of a sunny sky. Too often, however, our lakes are some other colour – green, brown or even red! For several months this past summer Lake Wilcox was a dirty brownish yellow colour and you could barely see your feet if you were standing knee deep. This is not just a local problem, as many cottage lakes also look less than pristine. So what causes these colour changes in our waterways? Does this affect water quality and what can be done about it?

The short answer to the cause is algae. Algae are tiny aquatic plants that contain chlorophyll. They make their food using the energy of sunlight and nutrients from the water. Several thousand species of algae live in Ontario's waters. Although often green, they are very diverse in form, colour and habitat.

The most obvious affect on water quality is the clarity. The more algae growth, the less clarity is available in the water. All plant life needs sunlight to grow.

It was interesting in Wilcox last summer as the weed growth was much less than normal. While over growth of invasive weeds causes the same problem of oxygen depletion as algae, most aquatic wildlife depends on plant life for food. Lake users were happy to see fewer weeds yet there was also concern that this was another sign of an unhealthy lake. Certain algae, particularly the blue-green varieties, produce a toxic poison as they decompose. This can be lethal for wildlife and humans, as even boiling the water does not remove the toxin. Indeed many residents in the Eastern Townships of Quebec were forced to rely on bottled water due to an outbreak of blue-green algae in their lakes. People have died from eating mussels from such an environment.

Generally, however, the biggest problem caused by algae is the reduction of oxygen in the water through the decomposition process that the algae undergo when they die. All life needs oxygen. In the extreme, fish and over-wintering reptiles and amphibians that rely on water habitat cannot survive in an oxygen deprived environment and the lake dies.

An over abundance of nutrients in the water results in the over growth of algae and invasive weeds. The main culprit is phosphorous. Phosphorous enters the water directly from runoff into a lake or through the stormwater system. It is a

main ingredient in chemical fertilizers and in many varieties of soap like those used to wash cars. It is also found in bird feces such as that produced by Canada Geese. In cottage country, residents also must be concerned about leaky septic tanks. Once in the lake or waterway, phosphorous is almost impossible to remove. It must be kept out of the water in the first place.

The single most important step we can take to improve our water quality is to reduce our use of chemical fertilizers. Years of drought are very hard on lawns so residents try to compensate by over fertilizing. Torrential rains promptly washed these chemicals right off and into our waterways. Many people do not realize that the water from their yard flows into our streams and lakes. But chemical fertilizers are not the only harmful substance that makes its way into our waterways through the stormwater system. Chemical spills, oil and gas leaked from cars, pesticides, road salt, etc. are washed into the sewers and into our lakes.

It is possible to have a healthy lawn and garden without chemicals. Plan to attend one of the Organic Lawn Care Workshops in Richmond Hill noted below. *For more information on algae visit: www.ene.gov.on.ca/programs/4661e.pdf*

Organic Lawn Care Workshops

Thursday March 5, 2009

7:00pm - 8:30pm

Elgin West Community Centre

Palisade Room

11099 Bathurst Street, R Hill

Bar Code 264009

Saturday March 28, 2009

10:30am - 12:00 noon

Rouge Woods Community Centre

Beech Room, 110 Shirley Drive, R Hill

Bar Code: 264010

Register by phone or online at

<http://ereg.richmondhill.ca>

For more information, contact us at 905 508-7012 X 230.

Town of Richmond Hill &
York Region Environmental Alliance
Partners in Green Communities



ORGANIC MAPLE SYRUP – WHY BOTHER: a clean food commentary

by Bob Burrows

The maple syrup season will soon be in full swing - a wonderful Canadian spring tradition passed down to us from our First Nations people.

I recently had a customer remark: "Organic maple syrup? Why bother? Surely they don't spray maple trees with anything. Maple syrup is pretty well organic anyway." I used to think that too until I tried making syrup myself. Noticing that after a while the flow of sap from the spigots began to slow down, I called a local conservation centre that is very well known for its maple syrup production and asked what could be done. I was told that the tree was coagulating so in order to stop that they use an anti-coagulant - in this case formaldehyde - at the back of every tap hole that is drilled. When I asked whether they were concerned about adding embalming fluid to their maple syrup, he replied that this was not a 'problem' at all because the formaldehyde evaporates from the sap as it is being boiled down. Hmmm....

Organic maple syrup producers are not permitted to use any anticoagulants including paraformaldehyde. But that's not all. They also have to follow very strict regulations regarding the number of taps allowed on any given tree. They are not allowed to redrill tap holes or to do anything else that would compromise the tree in any way. In other words, these regulations are not just designed to protect you and me from ingesting undesirable elements in the syrup but to also protect the tree itself.

Although it is illegal to use paraformaldehyde in maple syrup production, according to environmentalist Defence, In 2000-2001, 24% of maple syrup samples contained residues of paraformaldehyde. Furthermore, test results also showed that 56% of samples had lead residues. Michel Lamarche was fined \$36,000 and lost more than \$46,000 in equipment after being convicted of making unregistered paraformaldehyde tablets for the maple syrup market, the second



time he has been found guilty of similar charges under the Pest Control Products Act.

Other issues of concern for consumers are the kinds of chemicals used to clean and rinse out the lines and the use of anti-foaming agents that control the development of foam that occurs naturally in the final stages as the boiling sap approaches the consistency of syrup.

Following are websites that outline the stringent measures of producing organic maple syrup as well as information on toxins in maple syrup:

www.ecocertcanada.com/eng/standards.html
www.environmentaldefence.ca/foodwatch/press/media/factMaple.htm

Once you have had a chance to review these you will at least be fully informed and can ask your supplier of maple syrup the questions that are of concern to you. It may well be that local producers are aware of the issues and are addressing them in a way that would satisfy your needs or mine - but maybe not. Another way to be sure, is to purchase certified organic maple syrup. Invest in yourself and the well being of your family. Buy organic food and support sustainability.

Bob Burrows is owner and founder of The Clean Food Connection with store locations in Mount Albert, Uxbridge and Newmarket as well as online food shopping with home delivery options. www.cleanfoodconnection.com/catalog/index.php

This commentary has been abridged, with permission, from its original form.



GREENWORKS



Spring 2009 Volume 3, Issue 1

Page 6

ON THE GROUND

By Jeff Laidlaw & Gloria Marsh

I remember looking at the York Region Transportation Master Plan a number of years ago and seeing a straight line connecting Pine Valley Drive to the 7th Concession running right up to Highway 9. It all looked plausible enough on paper. Unfortunately, if one then goes out on the ground, one finds that there would be serious engineering challenges, and one of the oldest deciduous forests in Canada right in the path of the alignment.

The southern part of York Region has grown at an incredible pace with almost every acre of land covered with buildings. Land has not been set aside for effective transportation corridors: roads, rail beds, rapid transit lines, bike lanes and the like. Instead, we have ended up with transit services that are mere after-thoughts which can't possibly service old, existing sprawling subdivisions designed with only the car in mind.

Our inaction has resulted in public impatience. Widening Highway 400 to five lanes in each direction as far as Barrie suddenly becomes a reality. People, instead of asking 'what the heck are you doing?' are saying 'when will you finish?'

The unfortunate reality in all this mess is that we've not stayed ahead of the ball. As Rob MacIsaac, Chair of Metrolinx pointed out in his presentation at the 2nd Annual Environment First Symposium, we are a whole generation behind in addressing transportation requirements. He identified these key problems:

- Too many people, not enough capacity
- Stations designed for cars
- Congestion costs us \$14M every day in lost time & fuel, accident costs
- Sprawling suburbs designed for cars, not public transit
- Under investment by 74%
- Behind the times on service and technology

In an attempt to address our transportation problems, Metrolinx has five objectives:

- Reduce demands on the system
- Increase choices for travel
- Meet travellers' and shippers' needs first
- Build communities that make travel easier
- Commit to continuous improvements



An European example of a well-integrated rail and bus system

Designated parking for transit users at all shopping plazas adjacent to bus stops should have also been added. But improvements have come. Well-designed subdivisions are emerging which minimize transit unfriendly, meandering streets. With the advent of Viva, gone are the days when one would have to wait an hour between buses at Finch after 9:30 pm. There is

also an hourly, round-the-clock, seven-days-a-week express bus from Richmond Centre to the airport for under \$5. Imagine, though, if you lived in Barrie and you could hop on a high-speed train for say \$10 - that took you to Union Station in Toronto in 30 minutes. Now imagine that train line running in the area where the new lanes for the 400 will be placed. THAT is creative problem solving. It's a common sense solution to a building need, and it's a far more environmentally responsible choice in the difficult balancing game we play between growth and the environment.

York Region has finally come to the realization that inaction has created a transportation crisis. We must encourage them to design transportation solutions into, and along with, transit friendly communities.

YREA - PLANNING FOR ACTION

Our first meeting was held on January 27, 2009. Speakers focused on home energy conservation. The breakout sessions identified many issues of mutual concern. YREA will be taking the following measures to further its goal to create an action plan to address these priorities from a regional perspective:

- Develop partnerships with environmental organizations across the Region to share information and expertise
- Seek volunteers to become municipal liaisons through attendance at council meetings and Environmental Advisory Committee meetings to strengthen a coordinated response with regards to community/regional concerns
- Recruit volunteers to become virtual researchers on the issues of concern, helping to determine key factors, key players and most importantly, key responses to the issues

Our next PLANNING FOR ACTION meeting will be held on May 7, 2009 and will be a follow through and expansion of the first. For minutes and full details of our January 27th meeting, please go to our website: www.yrea.org/planning.html





GREENWORKS



Spring 2009 Volume 3, Issue 1

Page 7

YREA EXTENDS ITS HEARTFELT THANKS TO OUR LATEST DONORS:

CUSTODIAN

Atkinson Renglich Family

STEWARD

Anonymous

KEEPER

Anonymous

FRIEND

Barb Cruikshank
Sharon Bradley

To better serve our communities, YREA is in the midst of the biggest growth spurt since its founding in 1999. Our three-year capacity building strategic plans include:

- an expansion of our communication and outreach network
- the building of our volunteer and support base
- the development of an e-library as a source of public environmental information

We believe these actions will enable us to successfully contribute to a healthy, sustainable environment in a responsive, relevant, effective and resilient manner. However, to carry out our objectives to the best of our ability, we need your financial support.

Support the York Region Environmental Alliance today with your donation.

Your tax-deductible donation, coupled with staff and volunteer efforts, will allow us to fulfil our mandate. Please be generous. To reach our goal of \$42,000 we would need only 24 donors willing to give \$2000, 42 donors to give \$1000, 84 donors to give \$500 or 210 donors to give \$200.

Help us take action. With your support, we CAN make a difference.

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Please note: YREA does not exchange the personal information of our members/supporters with other organizations or groups.

We do acknowledge the names of our donors on our website and in our newsletter, but please let us know if you would like to remain anonymous.

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