

St. Marys, residents discuss concerns

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Published on Mar 21, 2008

In the wake of a strong advocacy campaign mounted by a citizen's group and a local councillor opposed to a quarry application for northeast Flamborough, St. Marys Cement is taking steps to allay public concerns.

The aggregate company held a drop-in information centre at its site office on 11th Concession Road East on Tuesday, inviting nearby residents to meet one-on-one with professionals who will conduct a pumping test on the property, if the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) grants a temporary Permit to Take Water (PTTW) to St. Marys.

The PTTW application, submitted in October 2006, has been vehemently opposed by FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), a grassroots citizen's group that has been fighting the quarry proposal ever since it was unveiled four years ago. The group has found a ready ally in Flamborough councillor Margaret McCarthy who has steadfastly backed FORCE in its assertions that the pump test could have serious, perhaps irreversible, impacts on the quantity and quality of groundwater in the area.

But St. Marys officials counter that the test is needed to evaluate potential impacts on groundwater resources that the operation of a quarry on the site might cause. "We are taking all necessary steps and precautions to ensure that local water resources are not impacted," said John Moroz, vice-president of St. Marys CBM.

A letter sent by the company to residents last week noted that the company ran two pump tests on the property in 2004 with "no reported impacts to any water wells in the area." The previous tests were two days and five days in duration.

The current PTTW application consists of three individual six-day tests rather than the 20-day period proposed in the original permit application, said Paul Odom, supervisor of water resources with the MOE's west central region. The volume of water to be taken from the aquifer for the tests has also been reduced from 12,700,000 litres to 6,850,000 litres per day, he said.

Odom added that St. Marys has submitted all the necessary technical information for its application and he will make a recommendation "quite soon" on whether to grant the permit.

St. Marys officials have assured residents that the testing will be monitored by the MOE and the City of Hamilton and can be halted immediately if any problems arise at local wells. But their recent information package says problems with water quality or quantity during the tests would be an "unlikely event."

Right now, the company is encouraging residents within one to two kilometres of the site to have the wells on their property monitored during the pumping test.

Voluntary

The program is strictly voluntary, but provides a benefit to residents, said the company's policy and planning manager Jennifer Tuck. They'll get a confidential report containing important information about the water in their wells and a graph showing water level measurements before and after the test. Their water will also undergo chemical and bacteriological analysis both before and after the test.

While only six people attended Tuesday's open house, Tuck said the mail-out was sent to 150 homes and contains a lot of information about the proposed test and another drop-in session will be held next Wednesday (March 26) from 2 to 8 p.m. at the site office.

In addition, consultants retained by St. Marys to conduct the test will be going door-to-door sometime later this month or early in April to speak with residents who live within one kilometre of the site.

To further address concerns, St. Marys invites residents to contact them at 1-866-602-0080 or by e-mail at communityinfo@stmaryscbm.com. The company also plans to host a public meeting about their PTTW application sometime in April. "We know water concerns are important and we want to address them," Tuck said.

The MOE has not yet decided whether to grant the permit.

A few weeks ago, Hamilton city council gave unanimous support to a motion championed by McCarthy asking the Ontario government to fully consider the potential ramifications of the proposed quarry on the groundwater-based municipal drinking water system serving Carlisle's 3,000 residents as well as on hundreds of nearby residential wells.

Council's decision came on the heels of a postcard campaign undertaken by FORCE as part of an advocacy campaign urging Premier Dalton McGuinty to protect drinking water and quash the quarry application. To date, more than 1,000 print cards and about 600 e-cards, sent through FORCE's website, have been forwarded to the Ontario premier.



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