

Ontario Council Standing Committee on Legislation, Mar 13, 2010

Power Plant Presentation

Mary Saunders, Lin Mackrael and Maureen Rudzik (President) of CFUW-Oakville gave a slide presentation and talk on the need for proper health and safety regulations for gas-fired power plants in Ontario.

The issue is of deep concern to the Oakville club because the Ontario Power Authority (OPA) has entered into a contract with TransCanada Energy Corporation to build a 900 MW gas-fired power plant called the Oakville Generating Station (OGS). The proposed plant is one of the biggest in North America and the proposed site is one of the smallest and very close to a residential neighbourhood. To get a feel for the problem, type in "Chisholm Academy High School, 1484 Cornwall Road, Oakville, ON" into Google Maps and look how close the site of the proposed OGS is (to be located at 1500 Royal Windsor Drive, south of the Ford plant, north and abutting the railway tracks, and just west of Maple Grove Village mall).

Surprise number one: There are no rules for locating gas-fired power plants. You can't legally build a 1.5 kW wind turbine closer than 550 m to a residence, but currently you can put a gas-fired power plant just about anywhere. The 900 MW OGS would be 350 m away from a school, 400 m from a home and 7.5 m away from a railway. The plant that blew up in Connecticut last month was smaller than the proposed OGS and was on a secluded 137 acre site. It still killed 5 people and broke windows 3 km away. If the proposed OGS blew up, it would damage 11,000 homes and many schools, seniors' residences, daycares and small businesses, not to mention the Ford plant, the railway, and major highways.

Surprise number two. Selection procedures for plant locations in Ontario are not transparent. Neither the provincial government, nor the OPA, nor TransCanada has been able to answer a key question: Why was the Oakville site chosen for this plant in the first place? We can't even get a blank project evaluation form. We do know from TransCanada's early open houses that the health and safety of residents were not among the selection criteria. And what's in it for Ford Motor Company, who is trying to sell TransCanada the necessary land?

Surprise number three. The environmental review of the plant is not independent. The government has let TransCanada conduct its own environmental assessment. TransCanada, not surprisingly, has concluded that the proposed OGS would have no impact on the health of the surrounding community or the lake, despite acknowledging that the OGS would draw almost 18,000 L of water from Lake Ontario every minute and return at least some of it back to the lake in a much warmer state. This conclusion of "no harm done" flies in the face of all the research done by the residents' groups of Mississauga and Oakville. So far, the Ontario government has resisted calls for a truly independent environmental assessment as well as a health and safety review.

Surprise number four: There are no limits to fine particulate matter pollution in Ontario. Gas-fired power plants are not clean; they are only cleaner than coal. Gas-fired plants produce tonnes of noxious pollutants, especially nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, ozone, carbon monoxide and fine particulate matter (also known as PM_{2.5}, for its particle size in microns). If built, there are no regulations to prevent the OGS from spewing as much as 160 tonnes of PM_{2.5} every year into an airshed that the Ontario Ministry of the Environment has already documented as being over-polluted. Canada is way behind the US, Australia and Europe in establishing legally

enforceable regulations to control many air toxins. The Canadian guidelines currently in place are badly outdated and NOT protective of human health. In Ontario, there is NO legal enforceable limit on PM_{2.5} despite years of government promises to act on this issue. The Town of Oakville estimates that 80 of its citizens die prematurely each year due to current levels of PM_{2.5}, and has thus brought in its own health protection air quality by-law to address the problem.

Surprise number five. The Ontario Ministry of Health is not on our side. The Ontario Ministry of Health (MOH) has stated that the proposed OGS will have no discernable effect on the health of the residents. However, this assumption is based on outdated studies, suboptimal or absent air quality standards, and an apparent willingness to ignore both expert medical opinion and international scientific literature on the subject. Indeed, one of the documents cited by the MOH is a study of inadequate scope that was funded by the OPA and was subjected to minimal and uncritical peer review.

Surprise number six. The proposed OGS doesn't even make economic sense. The OPA's own figures show that energy demand is actually declining in Ontario as energy and conservation measures take hold. There are already 6 gas-fired plants in and around the GTA that more than replace the generating capacity of the now-closed Lakeview coal-fired plant: why is the OGS needed at all? Note: TransCanada would make a guaranteed profit of millions of taxpayers' dollars every year for many years even if the plant never produced a single kW.

Why you should be concerned: If they succeed in building this plant on this site in Oakville, no community in Ontario is safe. If you don't take action on this issue now, you may soon be fighting the same battle in your own backyard. We have heard that additional gas-fired plants are being contemplated for Etobicoke, the Holland Marsh, Cambridge, and perhaps other municipalities further afield.

So what can you do?

1. Your CFUW club can pass a motion like the Oakville club's:

"Given that Ontario has no legal enforceable regulations on the important air toxin PM_{2.5}, nor enforceable setbacks in place for gas-fired power plants, CFUW-Oakville urges the Ontario Provincial government to enforce a moratorium on the building of gas-fired power plants in Ontario until :

- i) enforceable regulations on PM_{2.5} and other air toxins are established in Ontario, and
- ii) safe setbacks for gas-fired plants are established, and
- iii) other options for power generation that are less harmful to human health and the environment have been thoroughly explored as alternatives, and
- iv) the selection criteria and processes for determining sites of power generation facilities are made transparent to the public."

2. Tell your local mayor, press, and MPP that you have passed this motion.

3. Ask your local council to consider a health protection air quality by-law like the Town of Oakville's.

4. Ask your MPP to support Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn on April 22, 2010 when he debates his private member's bill on establishing safe setbacks for gas-fired power plants in Ontario.

We in Oakville would love to receive copies of any letters you send--please email to saunders@cogeco.ca). For more information on this issue, feel free to visit <http://www.c4ca.org/>, <http://miranet.ca> and the Town of Oakville's page <http://www.oakville.ca/healthprotectionairquality.htm>

Thanks for your support!