



Site specific risk assessment of an energy-from-waste thermal treatment facility in Durham Region, Ontario, Canada. Part A: Human health risk assessment

Christopher A. Ollson^{a,*}, Loren D. Knopper^a, Melissa L. Whitfield Aslund^a, Ruwan Jayasinghe^b

^a *Intrinsic Environmental Sciences, 6605 Hurontario Street, Mississauga, ON L5T 0A3, Canada*

^b *Stantec, 675 Cochrane Dr, Markham, ON L3R 0B8, Canada*

HIGHLIGHTS

- Human health risk assessment was performed for an Energy-From-Waste facility
- Results suggest minimal risks to humans expected at approved operating capacity
- Future expansion may cause slightly elevated risks under upset conditions
- Further risk assessment required if/when future expansion is pursued

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ABSTRACT

The regions of Durham and York in Ontario, Canada have partnered to construct an energy-from-waste thermal treatment facility as part of a long term strategy for the management of their municipal solid waste. This paper presents the results of a comprehensive human health risk assessment for this facility. This assessment was based on extensive sampling of baseline environmental conditions (e.g., collection and analysis of air, soil, water, and biota samples) as well as detailed site specific modeling to predict facility-related emissions of 87 identified contaminants of potential concern. Emissions were estimated for both the approved initial operating design capacity of the facility (140,000 tonnes per year) and for the maximum design capacity (400,000 tonnes per year). For the 140,000 tonnes per year scenario, this assessment indicated that facility-related emissions are unlikely to cause adverse health risks to local residents, farmers, or other receptors (e.g., recreational users). For the 400,000 tonnes per year scenarios, slightly elevated risks were noted with respect to inhalation (hydrogen chloride) and infant consumption of breast milk (dioxins and furans), but only during predicted 'upset conditions' (i.e. facility start-up, shutdown, and loss of air pollution control) that represent unusual and/or transient occurrences. However, current provincial regulations require that additional environmental screening would be mandatory prior to expansion of the facility beyond the initial approved capacity (140,000 tonnes per year). Therefore, the potential risks due to upset conditions for the 400,000 tonnes per year scenario should be more closely investigated if future expansion is pursued.

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1. Introduction

The Regions of Durham and York in Ontario, Canada partnered in 2005 to seek a long-term sustainable solution for managing their municipal solid waste. Both Regions have made considerable commitments to decreasing waste production and increasing waste diversion (e.g. through recycling or composting initiatives), but a management strategy is still required for residual waste not diverted through these strategies. Previously, this residual waste was largely exported out of the Regions (primarily to Michigan) for landfill. However, when it was announced that the Michigan border would be closed to municipal waste from Canada as of December 2010, it became imperative to identify a viable waste management alternative.

Abbreviations: CAC, Criteria air contaminant; COPC, Contaminant of potential concern; CR, Concentration ratio; CSF, Cancer slope factor; EA, Environmental assessment; EFW, Energy-from-waste; ERA, Environmental risk assessment; HHRA, Human health risk assessment; HQ, Hazard quotient; ILCR, Incremental lifetime cancer risk; LADD, Lifetime average daily dose; LCR, Lifetime cancer risk; LRASA, Local risk assessment study area; MDL, Method detection limit; RfC, Reference concentration; RfD, Reference dose; TEF, Toxic equivalency factor; TRV, Toxicity reference value; UR, Unit risk.

* Corresponding author at: Intrinsic Environmental Sciences Inc., 6605 Hurontario Street, Suite 500, Mississauga, ON L5T 0A3, Canada. Tel.: +1 905 364 7800x232, +1 416 456 1388 (mobile).

E-mail address: collson@intrinsic.com (C.A. Ollson).

Due to public opposition, establishment of a new local landfill was considered unacceptable. In addition, it was recognized that continuing to ship the waste to an external landfill could not provide a stable and secure alternative due to the vulnerability of this option to public policy decisions made by external governments. Therefore, processing and treatment options such as mechanical, biological, and thermal treatment were considered. Through an extensive public consultation process as well as a detailed evaluation of environmental, social and economic considerations, the preferred option was determined to be the construction of an Energy-From-Waste (EFW) thermal treatment plant. Such facilities have the capacity to reduce the volume of waste by >90% while also recovering metals and producing energy that can be sold to offset annual operating costs (Rushton, 2003).

EFW facilities are widespread in Europe and other jurisdictions (Bogner et al., 2008). Research and monitoring programs around these facilities suggest that in light of strict emissions guidelines and modern engineering controls, these facilities are unlikely to be hazardous to human health or the environment (Bordonaba et al., 2011; Cangialosi et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2007; Morselli et al., 2011; Rovira et al., 2010; Schuhmacher and Domingo, 2006). However, a new EFW facility had not been built in Ontario for over 20 years. As part of the approval process for construction of this new facility in Ontario, extensive human health and ecological risk assessments were performed to determine the potential effects of this project on surrounding communities and ecosystems. This paper describes the methods and results of human health risk assessment; the methods and results of the ecological risk assessment are provided in a separate publication (Ollson et al., 2014). These risk assessments formed an important component of the final Environmental Assessment for this project, which was submitted to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) in 2009 and received final approval in 2010. On the basis of this approval, the project was permitted to proceed to the construction phase, which was initiated in 2011. Facility start-up is currently projected to occur by the end of 2014.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Scope of the assessment

This risk assessment examined the potential for emissions from the proposed project (i.e., construction, operation, and eventual decommissioning of a modern EFW thermal treatment facility) to pose an unacceptable risk to human health over both short-term and long-term (i.e., after 30 years of operation). Existing conditions at the proposed location for the facility were also assessed in order to provide a baseline for the assessment (Table 1). The entire assessment was carried out following the US EPA human health risk assessment protocol for hazardous waste combustion facilities (US EPA, 2005).

The initial operating design capacity of the proposed facility was 140,000 tonnes per year, with a capacity for expansion to 400,000 tonnes per year within the 30-year planning period. As the expansion

of the facility beyond the initial approved capacity of 140,000 tonnes per year would require additional environmental screening under provincial regulations, the present risk assessment focused primarily on the potential risks from the facility with respect to operation at the 140,000 tonnes per year level. However, for comparison purposes, consideration was also given to the potential risks associated with the maximum design capacity of 400,000 tonnes per year.

2.2. Facility description

Facility design information for this assessment was provided by Covanta Energy Corporation, which was selected by the Regions as the preferred vendor for this project. Covanta, the largest provider of thermal treatment services in North America (with 40 facilities in the United States and one in Canada), was contracted by the Regions to direct the design, engineering, construction and operation of the facility. Therefore, they were able to provide detailed information, specific to the planned facility, which also reflects the features and functionality of existing modern EFW facilities elsewhere in North America.

This facility will be accepting municipal solid waste from typical Ontario curbside waste collection (i.e. household waste excluding separated recyclable materials and organics). No additional feed stock separation will occur at the facility. The facility will use a thermal mass burn technology, wherein municipal solid waste is fed into a furnace and burned at very high temperatures. For the initial operating design capacity of 140,000 tonnes per year, there will be two independent waste processing trains consisting of a feed chute, stoker, integrated furnace/boiler, dry recirculation acid gas scrubber, a fabric filter bag house and associated ash and residue collection systems. Expansion to the maximum design capacity (400,000 tonnes per year) would include the addition of two more waste processing trains. Steam produced in each boiler will drive a turbine-generator to produce electricity for delivery to the grid, for in-plant use and/or district heating. After the removal of residual metals for recycling, ash produced by the process will be shipped to landfill for use as daily cover or will be reused, possibly as road construction material or other civil projects. Air pollution control equipment throughout the facility will ensure that emissions do not exceed the provincial guidelines outlined by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE, 2004a) and specific conditions of Certificate of Approval 7306-8FDKNX issued June 28, 2011 for the Facility.

2.3. Identification of chemicals of potential concern (COPC)

Chemicals that could potentially be released by the facility to the atmosphere were identified by reviewing sources such as existing provincial guidelines for municipal incinerators (MOE, 2004a), the Canadian National Pollutant Release Inventory for waste incinerators (Environment Canada, 2007), and the results of stack testing of an existing waste incinerator in nearby Brampton, Ontario. From this review, a COPC list consisting of 87 chemicals was developed (Table 2) that consisted of both Criteria Air Contaminants (CACs,

Table 1
Project scenarios considered in the human health risk assessment.

Project Scenarios	Case	Conditions assessed
Existing Conditions	Baseline	Existing conditions in the assessment area. No Facility-related emissions or exposures were included as this was completed prior to construction and operation of the Facility.
Construction Operation	Baseline Traffic	Offsite vehicle traffic emissions prior to the start-up of the Facility.
	Construction	Construction and commissioning of the Facility.
	Project Alone	Emissions from the Facility alone.
	Project (Baseline + Project)	Emissions from the Facility combined with existing/baseline conditions.
	Process Upset	Emissions from the Facility operating at upset conditions (i.e., Facility start-up, shutdown, and loss of air pollution control).
	Process Upset Project (Baseline + Upset)	Emissions from the Facility operating at upset conditions combined with existing/baseline conditions.
Decommissioning	Traffic	Emissions from offsite and onsite traffic associated with the Facility combined with baseline traffic conditions and onsite stationary source emissions for the Facility.
	Decommissioning (Closure Period)	Emissions related to the removal of infrastructure and rehabilitation of the Site.

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