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St. Marys OKs water testing

Quarry move reverses earlier stance

ERIC MCGUINNESS

The Hamilton Spectator

FLAMBOROUGH (Dec 26, 2009)

St. Marys Cement is doing a sharp about-face on the controversial issue of water testing for its proposed limestone quarry northeast of Carlisle.

In a surprise announcement, the company now says it will conduct pumping tests aimed at proving the feasibility of its plan to keep a 10-storey-deep pit dry without affecting area wells, wetlands and streams.

Just a year ago, after the Ministry of the Environment rejected results of a preliminary test, St. Marys refused to repeat it, saying it was confident it could win a quarry licence from the Ministry of Natural Resources, then apply for an Environment Ministry water-taking permit to operate the quarry.

But St. Marys vice-president John Moroz now says the company plans a new testing program next year to "demonstrate the effectiveness of its proposed groundwater recharge system and to ensure that we provide stakeholders with the technical information that will help to make an informed decision about our application."

Moroz's statement was issued by an official who was not available for comment.

The statement does not explain the change of heart, but East Flamborough Councillor Margaret McCarthy notes both the environment and natural resources ministries said months ago St. Marys should not receive a licence until it proves it can operate without harm to natural water systems, a position since adopted by Hamilton, Burlington, Milton, Halton Region and Conservation Halton, which all oppose the application.

The company will have to apply for a new water-taking permit to carry out more tests.

Jennifer Hall, speaking for the Environment Ministry, said: "We anticipate seeing how the company plans to address the concerns we have raised, as well as those of other stakeholders, in their permit-to-take-water application."

Back in January, Rick Smith, executive director of the advocacy group Environmental Defence, called on the province to halt the quarry approval process after St. Marys refused to do more tests.

"The ball is now in the provincial government's court," he said. "If a proponent can tell the Ministry of the Environment, in effect, to stuff it, and ignore required water testing, the system is broken."

St. Marys wants to produce high-quality crushed stone for the construction industry on a 158-hectare site at 11th Concession East and Milborough Line, close to the boundaries of Hamilton, Burlington and Milton.

Anti-quarry community group FORCE chose not to comment on the St. Marys announcement.

emcguinness@thespec.com

905-526-4650

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