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Ministries hold off on quarry OK

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Two key provincial ministries say St. Marys Cement shouldn't get a quarry licence until it demonstrates it can operate without harming well water, wetlands or surface streams.

That challenges the company's stated aim of obtaining a licence from the Ministry of Natural Resources, then performing water tests to get a pumping permit from the Ministry of the Environment.

St. Marys, a subsidiary of the Brazilian multinational Votorantim Group, wants to produce construction aggregate from high-quality limestone on 158 hectares of farmland and woods at 11th Concession East and Milborough Line north of Carlisle.

Both ministries now say water impact studies must be done before a licence can be approved, an argument made by the anti-quarry group FORCE, the municipalities of Hamilton, Halton region, Burlington and Milton, and hundreds of other agencies and individuals that filed objections to the licence application.

"We're very much aligned on it," said Graham Flint, chair of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment).

"Time and again, we're showing we're all lined up on the same side. There are legitimate issues, and any attempt to shortcut or bypass them is recognized as inappropriate."

Natural Resources' Diane Schwier sent the company a seven-page letter May 21 that concluded, "the ministry is not in a position to support the licence at this time."

She cited the need for more information on wetlands, wildlife, forests, Greenbelt rules, site rehabilitation and water. On the last, she said a proposed groundwater recirculation system was essential, but there's been no pump test to demonstrate it would work.

"Ministry staff suggests that such a demonstration is critical to licence approval, and recommends that testing be completed. Staff would like the opportunity to be in attendance when the test is carried out."

The Environment Ministry noted the application lacks even a conceptual design for a groundwater system, and told Natural Resources even if there was a design, "with no field testing, we could not support issuance of a licence."

St. Marys vice-president John Moroz said in an e-mail that "St. Marys remains committed to doing the right thing to address agency and community concerns. Through the process, we will identify gaps in understanding and information and make decisions on how to close those gaps at that time. It is too early to make a decision on another pump test until we have had an opportunity to get further into the process."

Now that the public comment period has ended, the company has two years to try to satisfy objectors to its aggregate application. It also has a pending application to amend Hamilton's Official Plan and zoning bylaws.

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