

Safeguards built into testing process: St. Mary's

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Despite assurances from an executive of St. Mary's CBM Aggregates, Mountsberg/Campbellville area residents continue to be apprehensive about the impacts of proposed pumping tests on the St. Mary's Flamborough quarry site.

According to Graham Flint, chair of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), rural residents are concerned that the quantity and quality of water in their wells will be affected by the tests. They're particularly alarmed by the high volumes of water being applied for by the company to be used in the testing.

The tests entail pumping a maximum of 12.7 million litres (2.8 million gallons) of water per day over a 20-day period. St. Mary's officials say the tests are necessary to prove that a groundwater recirculation system, to mitigate water impacts of the quarry on neighbouring wells, will work.

"We told residents we would do studies to prove negligible impact on water," CBM Aggregates' vice-president and general manager John Moroz said Tuesday. He expressed confidence that the tests will prove the effectiveness of the system, which recharges the aquifer with water pumped from the quarry floor. "We do expect it to work. Our geo-scientists feel it will work."

Flint counters that the system is unproven and the tests being proposed are too large in scale to be undertaken at this stage in the process. While acknowledging that the aggregate company should be allowed to test the system, he said, "Where we differ is on the scale of testing being proposed." He also charged that the testing is "massively intrusive."

Moroz said St. Mary's wants to deal with the water issue because it is one of the key areas of concern identified by area residents at Open Houses hosted by the company.

Flint said "the level of agitation in the community" about the proposed tests and the company's application for a permit to take water (PTTW) for the testing clearly indicates that the scale of testing proposed by St. Mary's is not what the community envisioned. "It's not the normal or appropriate thing to do," he said adding that the permit application to the Ministry of the Environment falls under the Class 3 category, which makes it "special or unusual." Class 3 comes with a \$3,000 price tag - higher than other permit classes because "it is not a regular, routine thing," he added.

While the quantity of water applied for is substantial, Moroz pointed out the company will not be constantly pumping at the maximum rate for the 20-day permit. Each of the three proposed tests will last four to five days for a total of 12 to 15 days of pumping.

The testing will also provide additional hydrologic data to the City of Hamilton, Halton Conservation Authority and the MOE, Moroz said. A previous, smaller-scale pump test conducted two years ago failed to provide sufficient information for agencies that comment on the planning application for establishing a quarry on the northwest corner of 11th Concession Road East and Milborough Line.

Safeguards have been built into the testing to ensure that water quality and quantity won't be impacted,

Moroz said. "The pump test can be modified or stopped in its entirety" if unexpected problems arise, he added. The site will be continually monitored during the testing and a contact number will be provided to address concerns of area residents.

St. Mary's applied for blasting permits as part of the PTTW, but company officials now believe that the trenches needed for the testing can be dug with excavation equipment. "We don't think there will be any drilling or blasting," Moroz said.

Flint said he feels "more comfortable" if blasting isn't required. He also said he and others would have a higher comfort level if an independent body was on site during the testing. They would also like assurances from the MOE that the water taking permit, if granted, won't be exceeded if the tests cannot achieve their targeted drawdowns because of permeable ground conditions.

MOE officials might choose to monitor the tests, Moroz said, offering assurances safeguards are in place to protect the water. "A lot of work has been put into designing these tests and ensuring that safeguards are in place."

Last week, some residents noted an increase in truck traffic using the 11th Concession to access the quarry site. Moroz said 35 truckloads of sand and gravel were delivered to the site over two days. The material was needed to improve access to the site and fill in low spots on interior roads caused by recent wet weather.