

Quarry foes put focus on well water

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Opponents of the limestone quarry proposed by St. Marys Cement hope to convince Natural Resources Minister Donna Cansfield that the company's licence application is incomplete without proof a deep pit can be kept dry without affecting area well water.

Critics see that as a key issue because Carlisle relies on wells and because the company suspended water pumping tests after first-phase results were rejected as unreliable by the Ministry of the Environment (MOE).

St. Marys refuses to repeat the test, saying it will wait until it has a quarry licence, then apply for a permit to take water.

The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has 20 days from the filing of the application on Jan. 22 to determine if St. Marys' application is complete.

Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment (FORCE), a citizens' group fighting the quarry plan, sent Cansfield a letter urging the ministry "to do more than just check off whether a technical report is present as part of the application file."

FORCE chair Graham Flint said in the letter: "We expect a comprehensive review for compliance and completeness, especially in light of St. Marys' refusal to redo pumping tests because of unacceptable results, as ordered by the MOE."

St. Marys vice-president John Moroz argues that MNR can approve the quarry application without the pump test results, leaving it to the MOE to determine later if the quarry can operate safely before issuing a water-taking permit, although he said "hydrogeological data will be part of the comprehensive review" by MNR.

He said: "There is a process here to be followed, and we are following the process. The first stage is evaluation of completeness. The Ministry (of Natural Resources) will determine, based on a very well-defined script, whether it is complete or not. St. Marys respects the process, which involves public consultation (at the next stage)."

Although critics have called St. Marys a bully, Moroz insisted: "We have been very open. We have tried to share information as we generated it. We have done our best to be a good neighbour."

The company owns 158 hectares of farmland, woods and wetlands in northeast Flamborough. It wants to quarry the underlying high-quality limestone for use in construction. Its application to rezone the site for aggregate extraction is still under study by the City of Hamilton.

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