

St. Marys water test challenged

The Hamilton Spectator

FLAMBOROUGH (Mar 6, 2009)

Hamilton's medical officer of health and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment are challenging the refusal by St. Marys Cement to repeat a water pumping test for its proposed Concession 11 quarry.

In a Feb. 10 letter made public yesterday by the citizens' group FORCE, Dr. Elizabeth Richardson suggested to the Ministry of Natural Resources that the company's quarry application was incomplete without data from a series of pump tests. St. Marys abandoned the tests after results of the first one were rejected by the Environment Ministry.

Richardson cited public health concerns over effects on groundwater supplying private and municipal wells in and around Carlisle.

Natural Resources nevertheless has since ruled the application complete and given the company the OK to start a 45-day public consultation period late this month or early next. It says if the city and Ministry of Environment have concerns, they will have to file their objections during the consultation period.

Environment's Carl Slater wrote the company yesterday over alleged inaccuracies in a St. Marys letter, telling the ministry that, instead of repeating the first test, St. Marys would seek a quarry licence from Natural Resources. It would then try to demonstrate to the Environment Ministry it could keep its pit dry without harming wetlands, surface streams or groundwater.

Slater said the test last summer provided no usable data because it was done in a period of heavy rain.

St. Marys vice-president John Moroz has said that test was intended only to characterize the underground aquifer, but Slater cites the company's permit application to show it was meant to do more.

Slater said the ministry's position is that the company has not shown it can operate a quarry while protecting quality and quantity of ground and surface water.

FORCE chair Graham Flint says it's time for the Ontario government to "get their left hand and right hand to agree with each other," arguing it's not possible for Natural Resources to grant a licence without resolving the water issues.

emcguinness@thespec.com

905-526-4650