

COAST REPORTER

LOCAL NEWS

Construction waste study shows little environmental difference



Brent Richter Photo

Members of the public view the results of a Levelton Consultants study at HSPP's open house on Sept. 22.

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While throwing construction and demolition waste into the boiler at Howe Sound Pulp and Paper (HSPP) will cause changes to its emissions and pollutants, the difference is far too small to pose a risk.

That is the early conclusion from a study conducted by Levelton Consultants, the firm hired by HSPP to assist in an application to the Ministry of Environment (MOE) to amend the company's burning permit to allow burning construction and demolition waste.

HSPP and Levelton made the results of the study public at an open house in Gibsons last Wednesday (Sept. 22). About 60 residents came out to go over the data and ask questions.

The study, which has been running since December 2009, found that several pollutants like nitrogen oxides, zinc and lead went up while burning the waste, but others like hydrochloric acid and nickel went down.

"But that doesn't tell the whole story," said Stephen O'Kane, manager of environment and energy division at Levelton Consultants. "Our analysis showed that all the maximum concentrations would be below the exposure limits that would indicate a potential for a human health impact. From that perspective, even with this new fuel, it's showing that it's safe for human health and the environment."

O'Kane said there are provincially-established limits for only a handful of the 22 pollutants the study measured. To combat that, Levelton branched out to pollution concentration standards set for other jurisdictions.

"We went beyond B.C. standards. We looked at Canadian federal standards, international standards. We looked at the California office of environmental health and hazard assessment," he said.

O'Kane also noted that the numbers run in the study assume HSPP will be burning 100 per cent construction and demolition waste all the time, when in reality, the company plans to use only 20 per cent construction and demolition waste.

HSPP is seeking to include 20 per cent construction and demolition waste in its boiler, as local supplies of traditional hog fuel are no longer available.

Al Strang, manager of environment for HSPP, said the results will hopefully bode well for HSPP getting the amendment to its burning permit, and he does not have a personal objection to the increase in pollutants.

"I'm encouraged by the results. They show what we expected to see," he said. "I live in this community. I've raised my family here. I plan to carry on doing that."

Strang said the most frequent question he faced from members of the public last Wednesday was around what the company is doing to minimize plastics and processed wood from being included in the construction and demolition waste.

Strang said HSPP is highly cautious of what it will be putting into its boiler.

"There are quality specifications in the contract we have with the supplier. We do regular audits of their operation, and we do testing of the products received," he said.

The construction and demolition waste is expected to be about 91 per cent wood waste, seven per cent pressboard and plywood, one per cent paper and fabric and one per cent plastic and vinyl.

Input gathered at the meeting as well as a second open house in Squamish, which was held Sept. 23, will be used by MOE, along with the final environmental report in deciding if it will grant the amendment.

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