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Coalition launches Facebook campaign

Posted By DOUGLAS GLYNN

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The campaign to stop Simcoe County's landfill Site 41 is going global on the Internet.

A coalition of environmentalists and social justice activists told a news conference at Queen's Park yesterday that they are launching a petition on the Internet site Facebook calling on Premier Dalton McGuinty and Environment Minister John Gerretsen to halt the controversial dump.

Danny Beaton, a Mohawk environmentalist, was joined by Elizabeth May, Green Party leader; Maude Barlow, senior advisor on water to the President of the UN General Assembly, and long-time Site 41 opponent Steve Ogden in calling on the government to stop the dump.

Simcoe North MPP Garfield Dunlop, who last year introduced a Private Members' bill in the Legislature aimed at stopping Site 41, said in an interview that he hopes people across Canada will respond to this latest effort.

"I've said before that Site 41 is a mistake," Dunlop said. "The best thing would be for everybody to save face; to drop this thing and move on.

"Hopefully this (Facebook) effort works and the Premier and Environment Minister listen," he added.

Beaton, who with Steve Ogden, walked from Tiny Township to Toronto in November to publicize their concerns about the impact of a dump over what has been described as a "pristine aquifer," told the news conference that proceeding with the dump "is a form of eco-genocide.

"The aquifers and waters of Georgian Bay do not belong to us," Beaton said, "they belong to our children. It is our responsibility as adults to protect the water for them"

By failing to act in the public interest, the Liberal government is "allowing the potential destruction of one of most pristine water supplies in Ontario," he added.

Barlow, who is also chair of the Council of Canadians, said it is a myth that Canada has an abundance of water resources. Twenty per cent of the municipalities in Ontario experienced water shortages last year.

May told reporters that the federal government has failed to consult with aboriginal people about the impact of Site 41. She said the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has failed to adequately investigate its potential impact on McDonald Creek.

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"If the McGuinty government is serious about protecting Ontario's water and reducing waste, it needs to revoke the (County's) water taking permit immediately," she said.

Ogden said if the Ministry of the Environment is serious about creating a zero waste society it can prove it "by killing this dump site now."

Beaton said support for the campaign is growing. "We have the backing of the Sierra Club of Canada, the Environmental Law Association and the Ontario NDP.

Opposition to Site 41 has also spread beyond Ontario.

The Montana-based Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth, a grassroots group of spiritual and cultural leaders from throughout North America, has also urged McGuinty to stop the landfill.

In a letter to McGuinty, Eric Noyes, the organization's executive director, called the premier "to consider carefully the proposed action, which puts at undue risk the precious waters that belong not to you but to your children and their children's children.

"We protest in the most severe terms the proposed Dump Site 41 and ask for your help to cease the proposed action. If not, water will be contaminated at the expense of our children, yours and mine alike."

Approval of landfill Site 41 was initially sought by the North Simcoe Waste Management Association (NSWMA), which included Midland, Penetanguishene, the townships of Tay and Tiny, Victoria Harbour and Port McNicoll.

The application was rejected by a Joint Board in 1989 after public hearings. As Ray Millar, former community monitoring committee chair, said in a letter to Gerretsen last year: "In November of 1989, the Joint Board found that the EA (environmental assessment) carried out by the proponent (NSWMA) was irredeemably deficient', the site selection process was

non-existent', site comparison flawed' and the overall process was not logical, traceable or replicable."

The NSWMA reportedly appealed to the then Liberal government of David Peterson.

In June of 1990, the Cabinet through an Order-in-Council, rescinded the Joint Board decision and directing a resumption of the hearings. Site 41 was eventually approved.

At the time, the board chair, Robert Eisen, wrote, in part: "I am unable to reconcile the Board's previous findings and my interpretation of the OIC (Order-in-Council) in this regard. In the final analysis, I must regard the OIC as an interim order, the provisions of which nullify the Board's earlier criticisms'."

In 1990, the County of Simcoe assumed the responsibility for waste management.

Preliminary work at Site 41 began last year. In December, the Ministry of the Environment granted the county's application for a permit to take water.

A statement issued by Simcoe County after the permit was approved said it expects construction will be complete by autumn 2009, allowing the site to be fully operational by the end of next year.

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