Site 41 Symposium
The beginning of the end for landfills?

You are cordially invited to attend the upcoming Symposium hosted by the Centre of Environment and Sustainability, University of Western Ontario, together with the Elmvale Foundation, September 13 to 17, 2010.

BACKGROUND

The Site 41 landfill in Tiny Township, Simcoe County, Ontario, was under construction last year, but a mounting campaign of citizen opposition forced its permanent closure, just weeks before it was due to open. Ironically, the hydrological features that made this site attractive to engineers led ultimately to its demise because of concerns about possible impacts on water quality. The Symposium will explore the lessons learned from scientific, technical and social perspectives, from both "sides" of the debate, and return to the question - how to manage our "waste" while protecting our air, soil, and water resources for future generations, while minimizing our emissions of greenhouse gases. The Workshop to follow will explore innovative ways to achieve “Zero Waste”.

SIGNIFICANCE

Site 41 was the site of a historic environmental battle that pitted a diverse and broad coalition of First Nations people, farmers, cottagers and local residents against Simcoe County. The plan to construct a landfill at this site was controversial since its inception, mainly because of its proximity to the shallow aquifers that are vital to the local population and its economy. In May, 2009, the Anishinabe Kweag set up a protest camp opposite Site 41. The protest was supported by countless environmental groups and organizations and received national media and international scientific attention for having brought together, for the first time, Native and non-native cultures, working together for a common purpose. Site 41 is arguably one of the best cases of a growing and "successful" environmental movement in recent Canadian history.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Symposium is two-fold. First, to provide an objective and factual review of both sides of the dilemma which was Site 41. Second, since the landfill will never be completed, what will be done with the growing volumes of waste? This is a dilemma not unique to Simcoe County but rather being experienced by municipalities across the Province and indeed the world, where many landfills are approaching capacity.

By bringing together the experts, practitioners and decision makers under one roof, we have an opportunity to identify the lessons learned from Site 41 and use these as a best practice case of waste management as we move towards a "zero waste" future.
For graduate students from across the campus, the Symposium will include an introduction to geochemistry and environmental quality, for science and non-science students alike, by Prof. William Shotyk (University of Heidelberg) who is currently W.S. Fyfe Distinguished Scientist in Residence for Environment and Sustainability, in the Department of Earth Sciences at UWO.

The Symposium is being organized together with Michael Goodsite of the National Environmental Research Institute of Aarhus University, Denmark. International experts who have explored cases similar to Site 41 in their own country will lecture and share and exchange experience and ideas.

We look forward to meeting those who take part.

Sincerely,

Bill Shotyk and Michael Goodsite