

Letter: Incinerator ash plan and actions behind it are toxic

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By Alan Muller from Red Wing on Mar 31, 2016 at 8:00 a.m.

To the Editor:

Late in 2015, the idea of mining garbage incinerator ash for metals in Red Wing surfaced, and on Dec. 10 the Eagle published my letter opposing the idea. That letter can be read [here](#).

City officials were unmoved by my views — nothing new — and applied to themselves for a conditional-use permit March 1. A March 1 city planning department staff report, lacking in “due diligence,” recommends approval. While the applicant is the city, the owner is identified as Xcel Energy.

Xcel is the only producer of incinerator ash in our area, and this comes mostly from burning garbage originating in Ramsey and Washington counties. It is hard not to suspect that city officials are yet again running errands for Xcel rather than representing residents’ interests.

The application was presented to the Advisory Planning Commission on March 15. Mayor Dan Bender, who lives near the proposed project, suggested that the project be referred to the Sustainability Commission. This was done, and Commission took the project up March 22. People living near the site had done their homework and presented valid concerns. Bender said it was probably a good idea but not in his backyard. Public Works Director Rick Moskwa couldn’t answer questions about air pollution and other health/environmental issues, but stated repeatedly that Minnesota Pollution Control Agency was in support of the proposal.

I checked with several PCA staffers who work in this area and none was familiar with the proposal or the process. As of this writing, the company proposing the ash processing, Lab USA, has not returned a call and there is little solid information on its website. (Concrete and asphalt crushing is also proposed at the same location.)

City officials plan a joint meeting of the Planning and Sustainability commissions April 19, at which, it appears, they plan to bully the two bodies into approving the scheme.

I’m pleased that some Red Wing residents are concerned about this unwise proposal. The concerns so far are of the “not in my backyard” nature, but there’s a deeper need for a broader look at the unwise policies that get us to this point. All jurisdictions should be investing in more recycling (“Zero Waste”) and phasing out incineration. Efforts of Xcel, Washington and Ramsey counties, Goodhue County and the city to increase garbage burning in our city should be stopped. If they are not, we will be breathing more lead, mercury, NOx, arsenic and other health-damaging emissions. Garbage incinerator emissions, like the ash, are nasty.

Earth Week approaches and the city is planning a celebration of it — paid for by Xcel. The real need is for less self-congratulatory rhetoric and better decision-making by a new and different crop of public officials.

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