

Hydrogen pilot project at Canadian Tire suspended

By Bill Rea

A story appearing in Tuesday's Toronto Star caught the attention of those involved in the Canadian Tire controversy in Bolton. The story, written by Urban Affairs Reporter San Grewal, stated a pilot project, in which hydrogen is to be used as a green fuel source may be used at the massive development which is currently being constructed at the corner of Healey Road and Coleraine Drive.

But in response to the story, Canadian Tire announced it would be backing off the pilot project.

In a statement, the corporation's Senior Vice President Duncan Fulton stated it involves "plans to examine hydrogen fuel cells as a cleaner, safer and more efficient energy source for our lift trucks in our distribution centres."

"As of this morning we have temporarily suspended the hydrogen fuel cell pilot in Brampton and Bolton," Fulton reported. "And we will be public and transparent about any intention to restart the pilot projects after reviewing additional research and due diligence."

He also stated that engineers "have methodically planned a safe pilot at our Brampton distribution centre," adding they were exploring the possibility of expanding it to the new Bolton operation.

"I understand that the plans for the pilot have evolved over time, but any perception that we've hidden something is simply not the way we operate and doesn't reflect our culture or brand," Fulton's statement added, saying they have asked their staff to share all studies collected on the use of hydrogen fuel cells. "We will be asking for further studies and due diligence" and we have also asked to collect learnings from our competitors in North America "some of whom have been safely using hydrogen fuel cells in their distribution centres for years."

Town officials didn't think it was a big deal.

Fire Chief David Forfar said he hadn't been told about the hydrogen, although he added he would have been told about them only if Town planners had some concern.

"That's just normal procedure," he said.

Forfar added there are proper storage and dispensing standards for handling this element, and they are administered through the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA). If TSSA approves it, the Town would receive a certificate of approval.

He added use of hydrogen is nothing new.

Forfar said a lot of buses in Toronto run on hydrogen, meaning there has to be a large storage facility to service them.

"The whole thing's a non-issue," he said. "It's all controlled by TSSA."

"They're trying to make something out of nothing," Mayor Marolyn Morrison commented, adding hydrogen fuel cells have been used at a number of facilities around the country for about 12 years.

She said it's considered a "huge advancement," adding it's seen as economical and that these cells are considered safer than lead acid batteries and propane.

Morrison also said plans to use hydrogen cells at the Bolton facility are clearly marked on the site plan, and there are requirements to show how it is to be stored and secured in order to get the building permit.

"There are very, very strict rules and regulations in place by the federal and Provincial governments," she said.

The issue came up at a candidates' meeting Tuesday, hosted by Your Voice for Bolton, the residents' group that has been opposing the Canadian Tire development.

Kim Seipt of Your Voice for Bolton told the audience of the announcement that the pilot program was being suspended.

"It's something, for sure," she said, but also stated that public process in the development had been circumvented.

"I'm glad that it's been exposed," she commented after the meeting.

Seipt added the issue is not hydrogen.

"The issue is the lack of transparency provided to the public through the input process, and hydrogen was never mentioned in any public meeting," she commented.