

TOWN OF MINITONAS
SUBMISSION
TO THE CLEAN ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
PROVINCE OF MANITOBA
RE: Louisiana Pacific Minitonas Oriented Strand
Board Plant Air Emission Review.
PRESENTED BY: HENRY BARKOWSKI, MAYOR

2009/07/29

TOWN OF MINITONAS
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My name is Henry Barkowski. I am the mayor of the Town of Minitonas.

I thank the commission for giving me this opportunity to participate in the Louisiana Pacific Minitonas Oriented Strand Board Plant Air Emission Review. I make this presentation on behalf of the Town of Minitonas.

Although I have a BSc. and a MEd., I do not consider myself an expert on the scientific matters before this public meeting.

You may be gracious enough to give me some acknowledgement of having some expertise in community by having had 31 years of experience on the Minitonas Town Council and being a resident for 39 years.

We are the community that is in closest proximity to the Louisiana Pacific mill. We are a community of about 500 residents. Minitonas is great place to live and raise a family. We are a progressive, safe and caring community.

As a council we are always concerned about the health, safety and welfare of our citizens.

As this meeting is concerned with health and safety of citizens, permit me to cite some examples of our commitment to the safety of our citizens:

Water Testing

Our public water utility provides high quality water to the community. The water is derived from an underground aquifer and is treated by reverse osmosis and chlorinated. It is monitored daily and tested by an authorized lab biweekly. Samples are taken from various locations in town. We have the reputation for having some of the best water in Manitoba.

West Nile Mitigation

We eliminated areas where water could accumulate by improved drainage and installation of storm drain. A major project is on the table to install a storm drain on Knox Avenue.

We consistently cut grass in ditches. These efforts reduce or eliminate breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

We do not larvacide or fog for mosquitoes preventing release of additional chemical into the environment.

Green Space Maintenance

We do not use chemicals on our green spaces such as parks and playgrounds.

RCMP Annual Public Meeting

We are probably one of a few communities that meet on an annual basis with our RCMP to discuss issues of public safety. Approximately 30 – 40 persons attend these meetings. The RCMP also support an annual bicycle rodeo conducted by Minitonas Early Years School to promote safety for young cyclist.

Safe Property

We enforce by laws to promote safe buildings and property. Some 12 abandoned wells have been filled in the past two years and 21 derelict buildings have been demolished in the past six years. We consistently monitor properties and have virtually eliminated properties that pose risks.

As this meeting is also concerned with the environment I cite samples of how we have been proactive and undertaken some green initiatives that benefit our environment

Tree Planting

In the past five years, over 2500 trees have been planted in the community. Most of these trees, deciduous and coniferous, were supplied at no cost by Louisiana Pacific.

Waste Reduction

As a community we operate a recycling program under the Manitoba Product Stewardship program. In addition we recycle scrap metal, tires, batteries, chemical containers and e-waste. We also promote composting by offering home composters at a substantially reduced cost.

Lagoon Upgrade

Annually we spend approximately \$25,000 to treat our sewage in the lagoon so that the BDO count is at proper levels before the effluent is released. At a cost of approximately \$1.2 million we, in partnership with the Rural Municipality of Minitonas, and the federal and provincial governments, are in the process of expanding our lagoon. In addition to increasing our capacity, the expansion will allow for the natural treatment of sewage by sunlight, thus essentially eliminating our reliance on chemicals for the treatment of sewage. This will have a positive impact on quality of water that enters the Swan Lake watershed and ultimately Lake Winnipegosis. There will be no trace residue of chemical currently used in treatment.

Our partnership with the RM of Minitonas will allow for all the residents of that municipality to have their septic waste dumped in the lagoon. This will eliminate the need for all septic waste from being dumped untreated on land.

Green Energy

We operate a Town Hall, and are presently installing a geothermal heating and cooling system that will eliminate reliance on natural gas. The fire hall, the library, the arena and the curling rink are on electrical energy. The municipal office and two public works sheds operated by the RM of Minitonas are also on geothermal energy. Hence 100 % of the rural municipality's buildings are high efficiency green energy buildings. The Town council will continue to advocate for alternative green energy sources for all public buildings.

Public Engagement

We also facilitate public engagement.

All our council meetings are open to the public and occasionally citizens come to express concerns.

We are one of the few, if not the only council, that annually has anywhere from 15- 30 people come to a meeting to review council's financial plan, capital plan and strategic plan. Citizens present their questions and concerns.

We are also the closest level of government to our citizens and we interact with our citizens on almost a daily basis.

If a dog is loose, defecates or voids on public or private property we hear about it. If someone's property becomes even slightly unkempt we hear about it. If someone is driving an off road vehicle we hear about it whether they are breaking a law or not. Our citizen's are not shy to express their concerns nor do they lack opportunity to do so.

We have not had any concern expressed to us regarding Louisiana Pacific's plan to discontinue the use of the RTO units.

Since the early years of operation of the Louisiana Pacific Minitonas OSB plant, a community liaison committee has included members of the local municipal councils. We have had a council member regularly representing us on the LP Liaison committee. At these regular meeting there is open dialog and communication exchanged between plant representatives and the council's representatives on various aspects of the mill operations. As early as 2001, Louisiana Pacific representatives have openly discussed their intentions to pursue the elimination of the RTO units and welcomed all questions from the committee members.

When we learned that Louisiana Pacific's plan to shut down the RTO units was creating some controversy in the media, we invited company management to come to a council meeting to discuss their plans. We had an informative meeting and asked many questions for which satisfactory answers were provided.

I have cited these examples that demonstrate that, as a council, we are concerned about the safety and health of our citizens and that we practice and promote environmentally friendly initiatives. We also subscribe to making informed decisions.

From the data we have reviewed, it appears that nitrogen dioxide and carbon dioxide gasses, emitted during combustion of natural gas in the operation of the RTO units, would be essentially eliminated. As well, the consumption of a non renewable energy source would be eliminated, with substantial reduction of green house gas emissions. The amounts of benzene and formaldehyde would be well within acceptable limits. The net result may possibly be even better air quality. The decommissioning of the RTO units appears to have no adverse affect on the environment or on health.

Benchmarks

As a council we were founding members of the Swan Lake Watershed Conservation District. The primary concern for our local the CD is water quality. One of the activities of the CD was to do a water quality study of the Swan River and Woody River, the two major streams in our watershed. Plans are to do the same for all the streams in the watershed. This data will serve as a benchmark.

Many of our residents were involved in a comprehensive health study to set a benchmark for the health of our citizens prior to the operation of the Minitonas OSB plant.

These benchmarks can be used for comparison with future studies to see if the air emissions have any impact on human health or water quality.

Louisiana Pacific as a Corporate Citizen

Louisiana Pacific has proven to be a good corporate citizen. Some of us have known the manager, a local person, from childhood. He is a person whom we trust and with whom we have a good rapport.

At one time our fire department responded to fires at the bark pile or plant quite frequently. We raised our concern with mill management and they had already undertaken initiatives to mitigate the fire hazard by eliminating the bark pile and installing fire detection and submission equipment at the mill which virtually eliminated calls to our fire department for firefighting services. Our department has not been called to the plant for over two years.

Several members of our fire department are employees at the mill and management has cooperated in releasing them for all fire calls.

The mill brings waste to our nuisance grounds and they have been compliant with regulations regarding disposal of their waste.

They have also provided bark sweepings for us to use as pit cover in winter when soil normally used for cover is frozen.

Our community has received sizeable donations from LP Canada Ltd. for local projects such as:

- Minitonas Arena receiving \$30,000 toward the artificial ice plant
- Minitonas Community Sign \$2500
- Minitonas Library \$1000 - a renovation and restoration of a local historic landmark in our community
- Minitonas Volunteer Fire Department has received various donations, in excess of \$5000 for equipment such as turnout gear, communication equipment, etc.

Economic Impact on the Community

LP Canada's Minitonas OSB Plant has been operating in the RM of Minitonas since 1996, and has provided approximately 175 jobs at the Minitonas OSB Mill and Forestry Resources Division in Swan River. Their operations provide opportunity for income to many area businesses and related service providers such as CN Rail, loggers, truck owners and drivers, fuel distributors and mechanical service providers.

Due to the current recession, over half of the employees are currently not working due to recent curtailment in the production of OSB and the procurement of wood. As a result there is a substantial decline in economic activity for local area businesses and related industries.

An emerging trend, which is of concern to us, is that of current LP (and related industry) employees seeking alternate employment outside the Swan River Valley, and putting their homes up for sale. This reduction in employment will be crippling to our community.

As a specific example, within the last month we hired an assistant town foreman. With only two weeks of local advertising there were 19 applicants. All but three were either directly or indirectly related to LP's Minitonas OSB Operation. Most applicants were actually over qualified for the position. Normally we would have had five or six applicants with one or two suitably qualified. During the interviews we noted that the applicants seemed to have a sense of desperation.

Taxation is based on assessment and assessment of a business or industry is partially based on its ability to generate profit. As LP's assessment reduces, there will be a significant shift in the tax burden for the RM of Minitonas tax payers with respect to municipal taxes. Other area municipalities, including the Town of Minitonas, will then see an increase with respect to education taxes.

The decommissioning of the RTO units will enhance the sustainability and viability of the plant by reducing substantial operating and capital costs.

Should the public meeting process find that the recent shut-down of the RTO units at the Minitonas OSB Plant have no detrimental impact on the air quality, the Town of Minitonas fully supports the permanent elimination of the RTO units. This would be consistent with our beliefs, practices and commitment to the pursuit of environmentally friendly initiatives. It would also sustain viable industry, communities, and contribute positively to the health and welfare of our citizens and their families.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on an issue which is of substantial importance to our community. We trust that the Clean Environment Commission panel, through this public meeting and in consultation with experts, will review all relevant data and make recommendation to the Minister of Natural Resources based on science, the environment, equity within the OSB industry and with consideration that is in the best interest of our citizens.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry Barkowski, Mayor

Town of Minitonas