To the courts again on International Paper

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Vermont was pushed into a legal fight with International Paper 30 years ago, and it's being pushed again.

When it comes to the water we drink and the air we breathe, there isn't a choice.

Last week, the state went to court to block the New York paper company's efforts to perform a test burn of tire chips. The Douglas administration has said that without an electrostatic precipitator, an up-to-date pollution control device, the burn would send dangerous toxic emissions into Vermont.

Gov. Jim Douglas, who has been tenacious on this issue, traveled to New York to plead Vermont's case before New York environmental officials late last year, and even offered to have Vermont help pay for the pollution control equipment.

But Douglas and the other Vermonters who boarded buses to testify at the hearings in New York didn't sway our neighbors. And so the lawsuit against International Paper Co. and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation will proceed. The lawsuit argues the test should not be allowed without a full environmental review.

Vermont's demands are not unreasonable. If International Paper wants to burn tires to save on fuel costs, then it should install the proper pollution controls. This doesn't have to be an issue of jobs in New York versus health in Vermont. There should be a way to reach a compromise.

Vermont has done battle with International Paper and the state of New York before, with then attorney general Jim Jeffords successfully suing them about 30 years ago for the plant's polluting of Lake Champlain.

Again, there is much at stake. The Ticonderoga, N.Y. plant has a long-term plan of burning about 72 tons of tires for fuel every day to reduce power costs at the mill across the lake from Shoreham.

Even the proposed two-week burn would deposit unhealthy chemicals into Vermont, the Douglas administration says.

Vermont is fighting for clean air. It doesn't get more basic than that.