
Concerns about tire-to-energy plant aired

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A total of 12.5 million "orphans" could head to Erie in 2009.

That's what will happen if a tire-to-energy plant is built here, said Mark Visnosky, chairman of the Erie Environmental Coalition.

He was referring to "orphaned tires" -- those discarded throughout Pennsylvania -- that the plant will use to produce energy.. Erie Renewable Energy LLC has proposed building the plant on the former International Paper Co.. property on East Lake Road, but some believe that questions about the proposed plant must still be answered.

Concerned residents and some proponents of the plant met on Thursday at the Bayfront Center for Maritime Studies, 40 Holland St., to discuss the issues.. About 70 people attended the session, sponsored by the coalition.

"Currently in Pennsylvania, there are an estimated 12.5 million orphaned tires, or abandoned tires, in the state," he said.. "Those tires pose quite a problem, and the coalition believes incinerating them to produce electricity is not the solution."

Former Erie Mayor Rick Filippi said he isn't involved with the project, but he would like to help the coalition.

"As a citizen, I'm very concerned about the impact of a facility like this on the health and welfare of Erie," he said.. "This is just an ugly use of the site."

Mike Parker, a speaker from the Pittsburgh-based nonprofit Group Against Smog and Pollution, said tires are not a "renewable resource."

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, he said, tires should be used only as a fuel of last resort.

"Pollution always results from combustion, no matter how advanced the technology," he said.. "That pollution threatens human health, the economy and the environment."

Another speaker, Mike Ewall from ActionPA, said there's no such thing as a done deal when it comes to projects like the plant.. Ewall said he has seen residents get together and stop those who "wield some power and have dollars behind them."

"It's not beyond the power of those of you in this room to stop those of you sitting in the back of the room who want to build this plant," Ewall said, referring to the project's proponents.. His comment drew laughter from those in the room.

One of those men from the back replied, "We're here to listen.. We're not here to make a comment.. We'd love to hear what you have to say."

The project will create about 200 construction jobs and the plant will employ 60 full-time workers and cost an estimated \$100 million, proponents say.. The company hopes to begin the project in 2008.

David Agresti, the managing partner involved in the project, didn't speak at the meeting but said if the plant doesn't meet Department of Environmental standards, it won't be built.

"We all live here and have families here as well," he said.. "If it is not safe, we are not going to do it."

Staff writer Jim Carroll contributed to this report.

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