
Cost for proposed tire plant goes up

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The cost of the 90-megawatt tires-to-energy plant proposed in east Erie has gone up again, and so has its potential appetite for scrap tires.

An air-quality permit application filed with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection shows the total cost of the plant at \$235 million instead of the previously estimated \$200 million.

It also shows the plant that Erie Renewable Energy LLC wants to build would consume 900 tons and maybe as many as 1,000 tons of scrap tires every day instead of the previously estimated 800 tons.

And the application shows that the plant would pump about 1,450 tons of various pollutants into Erie's air every year.

Exactly what that means for Erie's air quality will be discussed, debated and dissected by environmental officials and activists over the coming months as the application moves through the review process.

DEP regional air-quality officials in Meadville said they could not comment on the application -- their agency only received it Thursday and will only now begin to peruse it.

George A. Monasky, chief of the new source review section, acknowledged that at first blush, the figures appear to show the new plant would be cleaner than the old International Paper plant that previously occupied the East Lake Road property where it is planned. It would also be cleaner than the former Front Street Generating Station, which was on the bayfront at the foot of French Street.

But how ERE's plant fits with today's environmental rules and regulations remains to be established.

Critics of the plant already see problems in the numbers.

"There is some stuff in there that I'm not sure anyone would appreciate," said Randy Barnes, president of Keep Erie's Environment Protected -- a grass-roots group formed to challenge and fight plans for the tire-to-energy plant.

Barnes pointed not only to the volume and types of pollutants the plant would put in the air, but also criticized other aspects of the operations, such as the volume of aqueous ammonia that would have to be trucked in to the plant and the 100-plus tons of ash that would have to be trucked out to a secure landfill.

Even as DEP officials get ready to study the application, K.E.E.P. Vice President Dennis Stratton said that group would enlist the aid of other environmental groups and experts to pore over the material.

ERE, in the application, detailed the pollution control equipment that it said is the best available technology. It also cited the economic benefits the plant would provide Erie, through both the jobs and electricity and heat it would create.

Comparisons to ERE's proposed plant are difficult to find because it is the only plant in the country that would use circulating fluidized bed technology and scrap tires as the only fuel source.

Other plants use circulating fluidized bed technology, but burn other fuel sources. The Scrubgrass power plant in southern Venango County, for example, uses circulating fluidized bed technology and coal to produce 90 megawatts of power, the same level as ERE's proposed plant.

The 2-inch-thick permit application for the ERE power plant is available for public inspection, and the first public hearing on the application is to be scheduled in January.

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