
Foust defends his opposition to plant

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Because of the controversial nature of my stance regarding the tires-to-energy plant that is being considered for Erie's lakefront, I feel it is incumbent upon me to outline my position more fully to the public. Many have a direct stake in the economic impact this plant would bring during its construction and its operation thereafter. As such, they deserve to have an answer from me directly as to why I oppose the plant's construction.

In general, I oppose the plant because the environmental and quality-of-life issues surrounding the plant's construction and operation outweigh the economic impact this facility would bring.

My concern and opposition stem from a number of issues: potential pollution that could be emitted into the air; the possibility of tire fires; and the storage and cleaning of the tires on-site. Overall, my concern stems from the possibility of all this happening in the middle of a heavily populated residential area.

First, the construction of a smokestack is done to emit things into the atmosphere. Erie Renewable Energy LLC has indicated that emissions information indicating a safe operation will be included in its application for a Pennsylvania air-quality permit.

However, if nothing harmful will be emitted from the process of turning tires into energy -- as ERE indicates to the public -- then the information stating such should be provided immediately.

The public, especially the neighbors in the surrounding residential area and the children who attend school nearby, should not have to wait until after the application has been filed. The people who will have to live with the environmental consequences of the facility deserve that information now.

The fact that ERE has not released specific information about potential pollution in great detail is alarming to me. I believe an open discussion about this issue would be a good thing to have published in the Erie Times-News so thousands of readers could analyze the information directly and objectively.

If the emissions issues are as benign as ERE suggests, then the release of that information would go a long way toward eliminating the concerns of the public.

My second concern is the storage and washing of the required thousands of tires per day needed to produce energy. This many tires in one area creates the threat of a tire fire.

While the possibility of a tire fire can be minimized by a credible security system, it does not eliminate the possibility. The effects of a tire fire in the middle of a residential area would be catastrophic and expensive to clean up.

The washing of the tires, which is required in the process of turning tires into energy, is also of great concern to me.

The tires collected for the plant will come from landfills and who knows where else. In many cases, they've been filled with tainted water and other potentially hazardous materials.

When the tires are washed, the leftover hazards must go somewhere. Even if they are properly cleaned with some agent, the side effects must be disposed of somewhere. I'm concerned that they would go into the atmosphere or the nearby watersheds. I've read nothing from ERE that alleviates this concern.

While I welcome investment in the city of Erie specifically, and the Erie County generally, I don't believe ERE offers an attractive investment for our area when you weigh the health and environmental costs against the economic impact the facility might bring.

However, I will, as I have done in the past, advocate for any project in Erie County that puts people to work, provided that project does not expose people's lives and health to an unnecessary risk.

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