
Group says plant idea stinks.

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Katherine Beaver can see the smokestacks at the former International Paper Co. plant from her backyard.

She said she knows how important smokestack industries have been to Erie in the past – after all, her late husband was once general manager at what's now GE Transportation.

But Beaver is among a group of east Erie residents organizing to fight plans for the \$94 million tires-to-energy plant that developers want to put on now-vacant land at the IP site.

"People put up with a lot when Hammermill and all the industrial plants were producing," said Beaver, a retired schoolteacher who lives in Lawrence Park, referring to the paper mill's owner before IP.. "We gained a lot from them, but we didn't know the dangers back then."

She said she worries about the pollutants that could come from the stack of the proposed tires-to-energy plant.

"I think it would be a big mistake to bring in a polluting, tire-burning plant," Beaver said.

Opposition to the plant has been growing, even as sponsors of the proposed \$94 million plant work through the details and prepare to seek environmental permits.

Residents have organized and allied with environmental activists to challenge and oppose plans for the plant.

Local opponents have started a new organization called Keep Erie's Environment Protected, or K.E.E.P.. They have started a petition campaign, distributed leaflets, and started lobbying political leaders.. They are working to form a nonprofit corporation, and have opened a Web site - www.stopburningtires.com.

"People aren't happy.. They are joining together in proactive opposition," said Marty Visnosky, chairman of the Erie County Environmental Coalition.

The plant would be the largest of its kind in the nation.. It would use 800 tons of tires a day to produce 70 megawatts of electricity -- approximately enough to power 70,000 homes -- to sell to Penelec.

The plant is being proposed by Erie Renewable Energy LLC, a company formed in late 2006.

Project sponsors held a meeting in March to unveil plans for the plant, which they said would offer 60 good-paying jobs and help ease the environmental headaches created by an estimated 290 million tires that Americans scrap each year.

In March, representatives of the majority partner, Caletta Renewable Energy of Boston, sought to reassure local residents that the plant is not an incinerator and that the fluidized-bed technology the plant would use is safe and clean.

"It will be a very good and very safe project," said Vic Gatto, a principal in Caletta and manager of the Erie project.

But instead of being reassured, Bobbi Dzuricky of Erie said she got worried.

"I didn't like the feel of what they were proposing," said Dzuricky, an eastside resident who works at a local youth program.. "I went home and did some extensive online research.. I just Googled 'tire-to-energy.' What I came up with was very disconcerting."

Dzuricky said the IP plant was a fixture in the neighborhood when her family moved in.

"We knew what we were getting into," she said.

She said she didn't sign on to live near a tires-to-energy plant, which she worries will not only bring back traffic, noise and odors, but will emit even more dangerous pollutants.

Dzuricky has also been attending K.E.E.P.. meetings.

"We have been meeting for more than a month -- we are gathering steam.. Signs are going up. Fliers are going out.. We have people from Lawrence Park, from Harborcreek -- people from the west side.. A lot of environmental groups are helping," she said.

Tim Reim, chairman of the Green Party in Erie County, is helping K.E.E.P. organize and the group has scheduled a public meeting for 6:30 p.m.. Monday at the Blasco Library.

Reim said he understands why people are upset. "We have people on the east side who for the first time in years their health and the health and the environment of the local area is better, and the thought of a new plant coming in that is as polluting or more so than the Hammermill plant has people angry," he said.

Greg Rubino, a local real estate broker working for the plant's developers, said company officials are still several weeks away from being able to offer any more specific information.

"As a developer, I'm looking to keep the economy here strong," Rubino said.. He said jobs at the plant will be good ones and the company intends to hire and train from the community.

"These jobs will be on average in excess of \$50,000 a year.. These are real jobs," he said.. "This will have a real impact right in the neighborhoods where the plant is going to

be located." Rubino, whose wife is an investor in the project, said the plant will have to prove it is safe to state environmental regulators or it can't be built.

Jim Carroll