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## Region needs tire plant facts

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Before the conflict escalates between developers and opponents of a tires-to-energy plant, let's keep one thing foremost in mind: We need more information to reach an informed opinion.

It's understandable why the neighborhoods surrounding the former International Paper Co. site on East Lake Road, where the plant is being built, have expressed concern. Images of tires burning and resulting air pollution are easy to visualize. It's also understandable why some, like the protest group K.E.E.P. Erie's Environment Protected, are alarmed at the idea of a facility being built on land bordering Lake Erie and in a residential area.

But two major issues strike us: Erie Renewable Energy LLC needs to do a better job of describing how the plant will operate; disclose, in detail, the contents of its emissions; explain how it will dispose of any byproducts of production; project its impact on the environment; describe again how it will store the tires; disclose whether the production will emit an odor, etc., as soon as possible.

And environmental activists need to respond to the actual technology that will be used in this plant, not merely denounce the generally dangerous effects of burning tires.

Is tires-to-fuel technology a truly clean process? How so? Is it safe? What is its track record? Will Lake Erie and air quality be threatened in any way? How would this plant affect homes, schools and businesses in the immediate neighborhoods and beyond? What kind of accidents could occur, if at all?

Yes, we can appreciate that the community could be required to wait for the company to go through its permit process with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. Or protest actions can continue, sure to fuel more hardened opposition to the plant's construction.

But must lines be drawn at this point?

Most would agree that the prospect of taking part in a new technology, investing \$94 million, creating 60 jobs now and likely more later, are exciting and optimistic -- if the plant is safe.

Many, of course, are suspicious that it isn't safe.

The only public official who attended Monday's meeting called by K.E.E.P. Erie's Environment Protected was state Rep. Pat Harkins of Erie, D-1st Dist. The plant would be in his district, and he isn't a fan. Trouble is: It doesn't sound like Harkins has arrived at his conclusions while really knowing the facts.

Then again, few seem to know the real picture.

The Erie region does need to know the facts. Erie Renewable Energy LLC and the DEP need to do a better job of telling the region what's going on. And an emerging environmental group should be pleased it has focused needed attention on an issue of potential harm. But it also needs to understand it's much more effective when speaking to facts than to fear.