
Tire plans roll ahead - Vendors picked for eastside energy plant

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Erie Renewable Energy LLC has picked the technology suppliers it says will build an environmentally safe tires-to-energy plant in east Erie.

Company officials said ERE has selected Sumitomo Heavy Industries, a Japanese licensee of Foster Wheeler North America Corp., to provide circulating fluidized bed boilers for the plant.

The ERE officials -- Erie developer Greg Rubino and Victor Gatto, project manager and partner in Boston-based Caletta Renewable Energy, ERE's parent firm -- said Tuesday that Sumitomo's equipment is in use at six tire-fueled power plants in Japan and South Korea.. They said the company was chosen because of its innovative technology and prior success in the industry.

Babcock Power Environmental Inc., a subsidiary of Babcock Power Inc.. of Danvers, Mass., has been chosen to supply the air-pollution control system, Rubino and Gatto said.. They said Babcock Power Environmental has a record of providing anti-pollution systems that will meet or exceed state environmental standards.

ERE is in the final stages of contract negotiations with Sumitomo and Babcock Power, they said.

"These are very big and very responsible names in the power industry," Rubino said.

Plans for the massive tires-to-energy plant at the former International Paper Co.. site on East Lake Road, which would convert 800 tons of scrap tires a day into electrical power, have run into stiff opposition from environmental activists and prompted the formation of an opposition group -- Keep Erie's Environment Protected, or K.E.E.P.

ERE officials on Tuesday predicted the larger Erie community would ultimately accept their plans for what has grown into nearly a \$200 million project that would create 60 jobs and provide more than 90 megawatts of electricity -- enough to power 75,000 to 80,000 homes.

"There will always be folks that don't want to see anything built to generate power that is not solar power," said Rubino, who serves as president of ERE.. "While we can't satisfy everybody, I believe when people see the environmental controls on this project, we will satisfy 99.9 percent of the community."

ERE's announcement did not include specific information on plant emissions or other technical data.. Rubino and Gatto said those details will become public when the company files its Pennsylvania air-quality permit applications in early December.

K.E.E.P.. President Randy Barnes said that ERE does not have signed contracts with its equipment vendors, and has not provided any technical information.

"They really haven't told us anything," he said.

K.E.E.P.. members have another public meeting scheduled for Dec.. 3 at Mount Calvary Catholic Church, 2022 East Lake Road, and Barnes said the group will continue to campaign against the plant.

The plant was first proposed as an \$84 million project, but estimates soon grew to \$150 million.. Rubino said extra pollution-control equipment now in the plans has raised the price again, to nearly \$200 million.

"The environmental controls on this plant would literally be among the finest available in the world," he said.

Rubino said the plant holds economic promise for Erie beyond the 60 jobs it would create.. He said ERE has had inquiries from other businesses interested in sharing space, or at least moving nearby the plant, to take advantage of the heat and power it could supply.

Gatto said the Sumitomo plant that most closely matches the one proposed for Erie is about half the size of the plant proposed here, and uses about 83 percent scrap tires and 17 percent municipal sludge for fuel.

ERE initially offered to organize a trip for a local delegation to visit similar plants, but Rubino said that has proven to be difficult around the holidays.. He said the company now plans to offer a series of discussion forums in coming months to allow local officials and vendors to discuss the project.

Rubino said Babcock Power has an affiliate in Erie, Riley Power Inc., at the former Riley Stoker plant at 1420 Cascade St.. He said some of the equipment for the plant could be made in Erie.

By JIM CARROLL. jim.carroll@timesnews.com