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## **Tire plant files permit papers - Opposition group plans to review air-quality application**

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Environmental officials and activists are getting ready to put the plan for a \$200 million tires-to-energy plant in east Erie under a microscope.

Erie Renewable Energy LLC on Thursday filed the air-quality permit application that it says will show that the 90-megawatt power plant it wants to build on former International Paper Co. property will bring to Erie economic benefits and not environmental damage.

"This is an important milestone in the development of a \$200 million-plus energy facility, which will benefit northwestern Pennsylvania in a myriad of ways," said Greg Rubino, partner and local project manager for ERE.

The plant would run continually 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and combust 30 million tires a year to produce enough electricity to power 75,000 to 80,000 homes.

ERE said the plant will hire locally to fill 60 good-paying jobs the plant will create on the South Yard and Dunn Brickyard portions of the former IP site. Company officials have also said they believe the plant's power and heat would serve as a magnet for other companies to locate nearby.

But the plans have drawn criticism from environmental activists and have given birth of a grass-roots opposition group -- Keep Erie's Environment Protected, or K.E.E.P.

"We are going to take a close look at it and see what is in there," said K.E.E.P. President Randy Barnes. "We have professionals who have offered to assist us to look through this stuff."

And environmental activists are not the only ones promising a hard look at ERE's plans.

"This marks the beginning of a detailed process where the department will thoroughly review the application and take public comment," said Kelly Burch, regional director of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

"As with any environmental permit application, we'll work hard to ensure the community is involved in this review and is made aware of all the facts," Burch said.

The environmental review of the 2-inch-thick binder of technical data is expected to take months.

Rubino said ERE welcomes the review.

"We are looking forward to the public information process and hearings, which the DEP will conduct as it reviews the application," Rubino said in a statement issued Thursday.

K.E.E.P. officials said they would not be surprised if DEP ultimately approves the application, but they said DEP approval won't make the plant safe.

"We feel pretty much that the role of the DEP is to regulate the degree and severity of the harm to our community from this corporation," K.E.E.P. communications coordinator Tim Reim said.

Burch said DEP plans to hold "numerous" public comment sessions, and it is making copies of ERE's air-quality permit application available to the public.

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