

Questions residents must ask about Cleveland's proposed municipal waste plant

Cleveland Public Power is proposing to build a new “waste-to-energy” plant at the Ridge Road Transfer Station. The plant, which would be classified as a municipal waste incinerator, would “gasify” waste in a combustion process, and use the gas to run a small electric power generating plant. **Clevelanders must ask whether this facility will be good for Cleveland and the region, and whether the facility will provide net public health, economic, and sustainability benefits, as compared with feasible alternatives.** The City has provided some information, but too much is tentative to provide a firm basis for reasonable projections of the facility's impact. Here are some key questions:

What will the project cost, and what will those costs mean for city residents?

The City has released figures saying the facility will cost \$180 million, including the cost of building a facility to collect garbage and sort recyclables, along with gasification and the power plant. However, the City has said these costs are not yet firm and that financing has not been worked out yet. Because Cleveland Public Power would be committed to purchasing electricity from the new plant, it would be stuck with the costs no matter what they are – and CPP is already losing its competitive edge with FirstEnergy. Last year, Cleveland added a new trash fee for residents – and if costs for this project go up, the City has not said what effect it would have on trash fees.

Cost projections are difficult because there are currently no commercial-scale solid waste gasification systems operating in the U.S., despite decades of study by large cities and state governments from California to Florida. A similar proposed facility by the same developer, in Clyde, Ohio, was cancelled because it was too expensive. This proposed project is an unproven combination of technologies that does not exist anywhere in the world.

The city's partner in developing the proposal to date is Princeton Environmental Group, led by Peter Tien –who was also the key player in the city's failed Sunpo Optu LED light bulb project.

What are the risks of air pollution from this facility for residents and businesses who live near it?

Neighborhoods, churches, schools, a recreation center, a Cleveland Metropark, the Zoo, food processing companies and community gardens are close to the Ridge Road site.

Though presented as a clean source of energy, gasification still involves the cooking of trash at high temperatures and the release of toxic pollutants into the air. As proposed, the facility would be one of the top air polluters in Cuyahoga County.

Gasification produces the same pollutants as standard incinerators. Identified emissions from gasification include nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, heavy

metals such as lead, cadmium, arsenic, chromium, and mercury, halogenated hydrocarbons, acid gases, and volatile organic compounds such as dioxin and furans. Even very small amounts of these toxins can be detrimental to human health and the environment. All incineration, including gasification, wastes the energy and resources in municipal solid waste. Gasification adds both directly and indirectly to greenhouse emissions.

Peter Tien said this about the types of trash that can that can be gasified, “...scrap paper, wood palletes, chemicals, medical waste, pharmaceutical waste, chemical liquids, flammable liquids, tires, rubber, plastics - anything you can think of.” *WCPN 3-10-10*

If they work, air pollution control devices capture and concentrate pollutants but don't eliminate them. Our city is already in non-attainment for health-based standards for particulates (soot), and soon will be for ground level ozone (smog). Pollutants will be carried long distances and can persist in the environment for decades.

With this project, Cleveland could become the dumping ground for trash from throughout the region, since the City plans to contract with other municipalities to bring their trash to the facility. The project will increase truck traffic and may decrease property values. Some landfilling would still be required as part of the project.

Is there a better way for Cleveland to handle its garbage and protect the environment?

Mayor Frank Jackson and his “Sustainable Cleveland 2019 Project” have committed to a goal of Zero Waste. Zero Waste means establishing a goal and a plan to invest in the infrastructure, workforce, and local strategies needed to eliminate our dependence on both landfills and incinerators.

But would relying on gasification become a disincentive to establishing environmentally-friendly recycling, pollution prevention, green energy and green technologies in Cleveland? We could be sacrificing the opportunity to create hundreds of jobs in the city and build small businesses. Would the need to keep feeding the gasification process, in order to generate electricity, become a disincentive to a strong recycling program? Recycling is more energy efficient than combustion. Recycling and composting far exceed all other waste management options in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

For more information: Earth Day Coalition, 216-281-6468 • Ohio Citizen Action, 216-861-5200
Environmental Health Watch, 216-961-4646 • Cleveland Clean Air Campaign, 216-246-4015

For more information on gasification: www.energyjustice.net/incineration

To view Cleveland facility documents www.energyjustice.net/map/displayfacility-74591.htm