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Ground broken on project using landfill gas to produce electricity



Photo by Amy Paterson/New Jersey Herald
A landfill gas-to-energy plant to convert methane gas into electricity will be constructed at the Sussex County Municipal Utilities Authority facility in Lafayette. A flare, at right, which currently burns the gas, will be connected to the new plant.

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LAFAYETTE -- Sometime early next year, the flame in the middle of the county landfill will go out and be replaced by the muffled roar of a couple of diesel-powered generators.

Ground was broken Wednesday on a project that will use the methane generated by rotting garbage to power the generators, producing enough electricity to supply about 2,000 homes for the next two decades.

The facility will include the two generators, which can produce 3.2 megawatts of power, inside a sound muffling building near the current flare, a large chimney-like device that now burns off the methane, a colorless gas that creates the smell usually associated with rotting organic material and is one of the so-called

greenhouse gases contributing to global climate change.

Behind the facility is a

New Jersey-based company, Energenic, which submitted the winning bid on building and operating the landfill gas-to-electricity plant to the Sussex County Municipal Utilities Authority, which operates the landfill.

"For some people the term 'green' refers to the environment," SCMUA Chairman Ron Petillo said. "For others, green means money. Here, we will have both."

The process involves collecting the methane through a series of pipes and wells in the landfill and piping it to the generator building. The gas will power the generators, producing electricity that will be fed into the Jersey Central Power & Light system.

Fred Eckert, an officer of Energenic, said the two generators will operate around the clock, and the facility will employ the equivalent of four full-time employees.

He said the amount of methane gas being converted to electricity reduces air pollution by the equivalent of taking 28,000 cars off the road.

Eckert said his company is investing about \$9 million in the project.

SCMUA will get a minimum of \$250,000 a year from Energenic for the rights to use the methane and the lease on the property.

That figure can go up, depending on the quantity and quality of the gas produced by the rotting garbage in the landfill, said John Hatzelis, the authority's administrator.

While the landfill is expected to be full in about eight years, the decomposition, and production of methane, is expected to last more than 20 years.

Production is expected to peak in about eight years, and Eckert said the generator building is being built with room enough for a third generator should the amount of methane being produced warrant it.

During the ceremonies, Lafayette Township officials asked about noise and the smell, two issues that plague most landfills.

Stephen Poniatowicz, another Energenic official, said the generator noise will be monitored, and sound levels are designed to be almost negligible at the current property lines of the landfill.

Most of the odor of a landfill is from methane escaping into the air. The system is designed to capture the gas underground and pipe it to the facility to be burned.

If there is a breakdown with either or both generators, the gas will automatically be piped to the flare facility, which will be on standby to burn off excess methane.

"I've been blown away from what I'm hearing here," county Freeholder Rich Zeoli said. "This is a great accomplishment, both environmentally and economically."

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