

County looks at turning waste ash into money

Two companies using grant to investigate ways to recycle incinerator byproduct

By DAINA KLIMANIS *The York Dispatch*

With a grant from the county waste authority, two companies will look at ways to turn waste ash into ceramics or masonry.

Trash incineration in York County generates about 160,000 tons of ash per year, and attempts to dispose of it have caused controversy. County ash is currently recycled into a building material that piled up when the recycling company had difficulty marketing the product.

For the first time, the York County Solid Waste and Refuse Authority is awarding research grants to look for innovative ways to use the ash, said authority spokeswoman Ellen O'Connor. The research money totals \$240,000.

"Looking down the road and recognizing that waste-to-energy is going to be in York County for years to come, we're looking for alternate uses for the ash," O'Connor said.

Alternate uses: A division of EnergyAnswers Corp., based in Albany, N.Y., eco/Technologies will explore ash use in technical ceramics and also in synthetic masonry.

Pittsburgh Mineral & Environmental Technology Inc. will seek to use the ash in synthetic stones called Brixx, which also re-use coal waste. The company won last year's Pennsylvania Energy Harvest Grant and \$84,000 for Brixx testing, said state Department of Environmental Protection press secretary Kurt Knaus.

The county currently sends its ash to the American Ash Recycling Corp., which removes metals and turns the remainder into a product called AggRite. That product is permitted for use in certain building materials in Pennsylvania and Tennessee, but structural and environmental concerns have limited its use.

After the DEP said a growing ash pile in West Manchester Township was too large by current regulations, American Ash Recycling began shipping AggRite to serve as daily cover in Modern Landfill in Windsor and Lower Windsor Townships. If AggRite were not used, dirt would serve as daily cover.

DEP must give OK: If the research comes up with viable and environmentally friendly uses for the ash, the authority may redefine its contract with the American Ash Recycling Corp., O'Connor said. However, she said the authority will likely not discontinue working with American Ash altogether.

A timeline for turning ash into new products would likely span months instead of years, O'Connor said.

New ash uses will have to get a green light from the DEP. The department has already approved of certain uses for AggRite and said in 2003 the ash pile did not affect air or water quality.

Some community and environmental activists remained unconvinced. Michael Helfrich, then-president of the Codorus Creek Improvement Partnership, said the DEP did not use the most accurate testing methods available.

About 40 percent of the waste authority's \$35 million budget comes from electricity sales, according to its Web site. The rest comes from waste disposal fees.

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