

sign out



Home News Sports Entertainment Obituaries Opinion Archives Subscriptions Classifieds Jobs Contact Us Member Center

Signed in as cocopop : sign out >>

Tuesday
November 18, 2008

<< e-mail this article >> | << printer-friendly version >>

County about to have best composting plant anywhere in world

By **COBEY HITCHCOCK**, Staff writer
chitchcock@themountainpress.com
Nov 17, 2008

PIGEON FORGE The future has nearly returned to Sevier County.

After being destroyed by fire in May 2007, the Sevier County solid waste compost and disposal facility on Ridge Road is nearly reconstructed and should be up and running by the new year.

"This facility was cutting edge in 1992," said Sevier Solid Waste general manager Tom Leonard. "When the new plant is finished, probably in early January, it is going to be one of the best composting plants in the world. There's a lot of excitement in the composting world about this facility coming back online."

The local compost plant was the world's first of its type in 1992, and 16 years later it remains one of just 10 worldwide.

But with the new facility, a new frontier in the field pyrolysis is drawing consideration.

"Pyrolysis actually takes the compost and the plastics out of the garbage and turns it into energy," said Leonard.

Currently, there is a small prototype pyrolysis unit at the compost facility, and the process works by putting garbage into the unit and then "cooking" it into a gas form. The gas is then stored in tanks and used to supply fuel comparable to natural gas to run a power generator that produces clean electricity.

"We're still evaluating the system to see if it can do what it says," said Leonard. "But with the cost of energy, it's becoming a lot more attractive to process the garbage, rather than just put it into the ground. I think (the world is) moving away from landfills and into more waste processing."

Although Sevier County does more recycling than almost any place else, visitors to the area don't usually know it.

"A lot of people come here and ask why Sevier County doesn't do any recycling, because they don't know what we're doing here," said Leonard.

When the compost facility is operational, about 70 percent of the county's residential trash is recycled into marketable compost material. In cities with recycling programs, even if 100 percent public participation were achievable, the most they could hope to achieve is about 27 percent recycling of solid waste.

If the pyrolysis system is implemented locally, about 95 percent of residential waste would be reused to produce clean electricity with no waste materials filling landfills.

Representatives from Spain, Sweden, Japan, China and Canada have visited to learn more about the system.

"It's great to be on the cutting edge," said Leonard.

The new compost plant, at a cost of \$10 million, will be bigger and more efficient than the one destroyed by fire. Instead of a single 77,000-square-foot structure, there will be two buildings providing more than double the area nearly 168,000 square feet.

The old building had a problem with moisture and corrosion, so the new building has been made of concrete, fabric and specially coated steel beams.



Cobey Hitchcock/The Mountain Press

Sevier Solid Waste manager Tom Leonard inspects the inner workings of a prototype pyrolysis unit at the new compost facility on Ridge Road.

AccuWeather.com
Sevierville
35 F
7-day forecast

Click here to **VIEW/BUY** Mtn Press Photos

NOW GET THE ENTIRE MOUNTAIN PRESS ONLINE!!!



Submit a Letter to the Editor

Place a Classified Ad

Contact Us

News Partners

Terms of Use



But besides being bigger and better, the new plant also simplifies the compost process.

"I think this plant is going to be extremely efficient," said Leonard. "We may spend a little money on the front end ... but it pays for itself really in very little time."

With composting refuse on hold since the 2007 fire, valuable landfill space has been quickly used.

"Putting in that garbage for the past year and a half has really filled up our space rather quickly," said Leonard. "We probably have about six to eight months left on the (Class 1, residential trash) landfill if we keep putting garbage in it. Then it's done and we don't have any more space at all, and I don't think we'll ever going to be able to have another one."

Once the new plant is operational, composting garbage will extend current landfill life by about 10 years. If the pyrolysis system is approved, the remaining space should last for at least another 20 years.

"It would almost do away with the need for landfill space," said Leonard. "We really don't need that landfill space if we have the compost plant and pyrolysis system."

The pyrolysis system, developed by Bedminster BioEnergy Technology Co., would add another \$15 million to the cost of the new plant, but Sevier County would not have to pay for any of it, including upkeep.

"(Bedminster) is offering to finance that part of the project for the energy part," said Leonard. "They would bring it in, and it won't cost us anything. But then they would get the lion's share on the sale of electricity."

But Sevier Solid waste would receive free electricity for plant operation, an estimated \$250,000 a year value, along with a small percentage of electricity sales and "green" credits.

In order to move forward with pyrolysis, it must be approved by Sevier Solid Waste Board and all local governments. Leonard said Sevier Solid Waste will be issuing requests for proposals within a month or two.

The earliest the pyrolysis system would be 2010, said Leonard.

The original plant was capable of processing 75 tons of trash per day, and the new plant will be able to handle 375 tons per day. If pyrolysis is used, the capacity would be 525 tons per day.

Currently, the county produces about 275 tons of garbage every day.

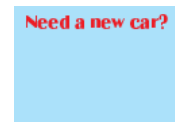
"So, the biggest thing is that the new plant allow us to have room for growth in this area for years to come," said Leonard, especially so if pyrolysis is implemented. "That's a big money incentive for us."

chitchcock@themountainpress.com

 << comment on this story >>

No comments have been posted.

Copyright © 2008 THE MOUNTAIN PRESS



Newport, TN
800-650-8516

-
-
-