

NEWS > SOUTH FLORIDA > COMMUNITY > FLORIDA KEYS



Florida Keys waste headed toward 'gasification'

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Yard waste from Monroe County will head west to a Lake Okeechobee town while efforts to build a "gasification" plant in South Miami-Dade continue.

Monroe County commissioners voted last week to sign a 30-month interim agreement with Energy 3, a Maryland firm, to haul yard waste out of the county to Moore Haven.

Energy 3 is pursuing efforts to build an innovative gasification plant in South Miami-Dade to convert Florida Keys yard waste into a synthetic fuel used by power plants. The plant will not be operational for more than 2 1/2 years.

Commissioners have expressed concern about signing onto new and untried technology, but agreed to let Energy 3 handle the yard waste at a cost of \$79.50 per ton for the duration of the interim contract. That is a savings of about \$5 per ton over current costs. The county produces about 30,000 to 40,000 tons of yard waste annually.

The county's own Climate Change Advisory Committee, along with the Island of Key Largo Federation of Homeowners Associations and the Last Stand conservation group, endorsed the move toward gasification.

"We're on board with this and think it's a great thing for the county," said Dottie Moses, president of the Key Largo federation.

Commissioner Sylvia Murphy cast the lone nay vote Wednesday, saying she is "nervous" about the being on the cutting edge of using yard waste for gasification.

"This process basically is an unknown one," she said. "I don't think the time has come for Monroe County to be involved in this."

"All we're asking for is that you give us your garbage at a reduction to current waste-disposal fees," said Patrick Saty of Energy 3.

The vote Wednesday ratifies only the interim contract. The county can withdraw from the agreement if Energy 3 doesn't proceed with its proposed plant.

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Until a gasification plant becomes operational, Energy 3 will carry the yard waste to the Oldcastle Composting Plant, which recycles the yard waste.

Waste Management, the county's waste hauler, bid for the contract but bid too high. It then tried to modify its offer with a lower price but that would have undermined the request-for-proposal process.

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