

# Register Pajaronian

Proposed waste project again set for approval

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After postponing the matter twice this summer, Santa Cruz County supervisors are now set to consider approval of a controversial plasma arc gasification project at their Oct. 7 meeting. The project is proposed for the Buena Vista Landfill.

First presented to county supervisors April 15 by the county's Department of Public Works, plasma arc gasification (PAG) is considered new technology in the realm of conversion technologies – processes that turn trash into something useful. In this case, the conversion technology would take organic waste bound for the landfill and convert it to fuel for generating electricity.

According to the Department of Public Works department, placing a PAG plant at Buena Vista Landfill fits into the county's Zero Waste EcoPark concept adopted last March, and is in accordance with the Zero Waste Resolution adopted by the supervisors in 2005.

“We are still committed to achieving a 75 percent waste diversion rate through aggressive resource recovery; however, a CT (conversion technology) application would allow us to economically handle the remaining 25 percent waste system residue in a more beneficial manner and with revenue potential,” Thomas Bolich, director of the Department of Public Works, wrote in a memo to county supervisors. “Most important, this type of technology would eventually eliminate our future dependence on other out-of-county landfills.”

The PAG project was proposed to the county by adaptiveARC, a private company from Carlsbad, as a demonstration plant that could process 200 tons of any waste high in carbon – municipal solid waste, green waste, construction waste, tires, any waste low in metal and not radioactive – and generate around 4 megawatts of electricity. The demonstration period for the project would be two to three years.

The plant, with an estimated value of \$11.7 million, would be built and installed at Buena Vista Landfill by adaptiveARC at no cost to the county.

Santa Cruz County would provide in-kind work such as grading the site and building a road to the plant. The county would also secure the necessary permits and approvals for the plant.

The reason for delays in county approval of the project is that the county is still awaiting

a proposed hosting agreement with adaptiveARC. Only recently did the Department of Public Works receive a comprehensive description of the project, which would determine which permits are necessary .

Until an agreement is approved by the board of supervisors, applications for permits from the county planning department and the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District cannot be accepted.

Among those opposed to the plant is Watsonville attorney Luis Alejo, who sits on the Watsonville Planning Commission. In comments submitted to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, Alejo called the proposal “a slap in the face to the people of the Pajaro Valley.”

Alejo has accused county staff and adaptiveARC of misleading the public about claims that the plant would have no emissions.

“I have many concerns and there are many unanswered questions about smoke stacks, other forms of air pollution, Brownsfield sites, and toxic waste that will likely be generated by the incinerator,” Alejo wrote.

However, Melodye Serino, zero waste programs analyst for Santa Cruz County, draws a distinction between incineration and the PAG process. According to Serino, incineration burns the waste and releases the waste into the air. With plasma arc gasification, waste materials move through highly heated chambers where they are converted into a gas that is used to power generators. And anything potentially harmful, like plastics, metal or batteries, would be sorted out of the waste fed into the gasification plant.

Environmental groups including Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Pajaro Valley Coalition for Environmental Justice have also weighing in on the issue.

In a July letter, the groups asked the county to conduct a full environmental impact report in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act, and that public meetings be held on the proposed project.

The Watsonville Planning Commission is scheduled to hear an update on the project at its meeting on Tuesday.

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