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## **LETTER: County should speak in opposition to the burning of any toxic materials**

Nov 7, 2019

Dear Editor: The Madison County biomass power plant in Colbert must be required to cease the burning of creosote treated crossties.

As stated by several others in letters to the editor section of this paper, when plans for the opening the plant and requests for constructing a water pipeline needed by the plant were being considered, the citizens of Madison County were promised a clean burning biomass power plant with minimal emissions and noise. Burning creosote-treated crossties breaks that promise.

While it may be legal to do so under current federal and state EPA rules, based on the initial comments made by officials before opening the plant and the current concerns of our citizens, it is not an ethical or moral thing to do. It is certainly not the actions of a "good neighbor." Our children and grandchildren deserve better than this and they depend on our stewardship to keep their environment clean. All citizens of Madison County should speak out in opposition to the burning of any toxic materials in that plant.

Because it would provide needed additional tax revenue for the county, I along with many others originally supported the building of the plant based on the information supplied about the "minimal" environmental impact the plant would pose.

In July 2015, in an article published in the Madison County Journal, Dennis Carroll, the owner's consultant for Georgia Renewable Power, LLC (GRP) said "...the plant doesn't plan to use the railway that runs adjacent to Hwy. 72 near the plant, but trucks will bring in "clean C and D (construction and demolition) forested product." He estimated that 60 trucks a day will transport material to the facility. "If you are building a house and you have cut off two by fours that aren't chemically treated, that's the kind of construction debris we'll use," he said. Asked if any materials besides wood could be used, Carroll replied: "No, under the definition of 'woody biomass,' we cannot process other fuels."

However, in 2016, bowing to pressure from treated wood lobbyists, and even though the CDC had not changed their data, the EPA issued new rules allowing power plants to burn creosote treated crossties. Under the rules, Georgia and other states were given license to opt out, but the Georgia Environmental Protection Division chose to adopt the new rules. The intent of the Colbert plant to make use of this change in rules was not communicated in an easy to access public way to the citizens of Madison County.

In September 2017 Dave Shaffer, Chief Operating Officer and President of GRP, in a Journal article, said "...the plant does produce a cloud," but he said it's all water vapor.

"On a cool day, you'll see a plume coming out of the top of the cooling tower," he said. "But it will be dissipated within 300 feet of the cooling tower. It's only water."

If the plant had adhered to its public statements, this would not have become the issue it is today. I am not against having the plant as a welcome neighbor and a contributor to our local economy, but I do expect them to abide by the statements that were made when approvals were being sought.

The right thing to do is for our county leadership to hold a widely announced public meeting whose only topic would be to hear and discuss public concerns about the burning of toxic materials. Madison County Commissioners, the Madison County IDA, and officials of the CGRP should be present to address these public questions. The meeting should address these public concerns and to reconsider the "trade-off" due to burning of the toxic crossties.

The Madison County IDA, Madison County Commissioners, and CGRP should also assess the decibel levels of noise (constant and in pulses) that are reported as coming from the power plant as well as providing independent measurement and reporting of the decibel levels of noise being experienced by the complaining homes near the plant. County leadership should require GRP to eliminate or mitigate unhealthy noise levels as much as possible and specifically address the complaints of the unacceptable noise levels from the homeowners near the plant.

Sincerely,

Clyde Verhine

# Hull