

Linden residents question safety of proposed clean coal power plant

By Eliot Caroom/For The Star-Ledger

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LINDEN -- Linden's City Hall is becoming a flash point for a debate over the science and safety of a new clean coal power plant being proposed on the site of the former DuPont factory.

Councilmembers, residents and activists gathered at a special meeting last week to ask questions about the technology behind the plant, which would store carbon dioxide under the floor of the ocean 70 miles off the coast of New Jersey.

Former DEP commissioner Brad Campbell fielded questions about the proposed \$5 billion clean coal plant, called PurGen, for which he is the special counsel.

"We have to know that the citizens of Linden will be very, very safe," said council President Robert Bunk. "I just don't know right now. I think safety is important."

The former DuPont factory site has been vacant for 10 years, and an environmental cleanup is almost complete, according to Linden Mayor Richard Gerbounka. The property has already been sold to SCS Energy, the group that intends to build the PurGen plant.

The hot button issue is carbon sequestration, which involves storage of the carbon dioxide, a by-product of the combustion process that produces electricity from coal.

Environmentalists disagree over how green the technology is, while local residents worry about its safety.

On the environmental side, supporters believe that keeping carbon out of the atmosphere is a necessary step to decrease global warming. Opponents believe the new technology allows the public to continue using fossil fuels so voraciously that any gains from the new process will be wiped out.



Michael Puzio, vice president of the Tremley Point Alliance, speaks to the Linden council on Thursday.

New Jersey Sierra Club organizer Grace Sica told the council that the Sierra Club opposes sequestration.

Campbell responded by naming other environmental organizations that do support it, notably the National Resources Defense Council.

"It's not foolproof. It's a lie that's implicit in the whole notion of carbon sequestration," said Michael Puzio, the 23-year-old vice-president of the Tremley Point Alliance, a neighborhood organization. "It doesn't address global warming whatsoever."

Puzio said that there is more seismic activity in New Jersey than other carbon sequestration sites around the world, and an earthquake could release carbon.

Safety concerns were also voiced at the meeting.

Tremley Point Alliance president Mary Kostiusko, 90, said that project could result in coal dust and some carbon dioxide increasing asthma in Linden.

Beatrice Bernzott, a longtime Linden activist, said Friday that of all the proposals she had fought, the PureGen plant is the worst.

"Our concern is the 15 million tons of dioxide in an area that is known for explosions and pipes breaking," said Bernzott. "If I lived in Tremley, I'd probably move if it was built."

Gerbounka said Friday that he believes the EPA and DEP will keep the site properly regulated and safe.

"I feel confident that it's a safe operation," Gerbounka said. "Ninety percent of the pollutants are going to be captured or used as byproducts, unlike the coal power plants in Ohio or in the Northeast."

The meeting was the first in a series of public settings for discussion of the project, according to Campbell, who has attended several public meetings in Linden in the last few months. Campbell said he welcomes the questions of critics.

"Any applications that we make will be strengthened if we take the time to hear the community's concerns," Campbell said. "The groups who are skeptical of the project like the Sierra Club are doing their job in terms of holding our feet to the fire."

His next date with the public is at a community meeting at 7 p.m. on Monday at the Greater Mount Moriah Baptist Church on 14th Street in Linden.

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