

BFI project would cut waste, save taxes

Browning-Ferris Gas Services, Inc. would like to reply to a March 19 letter in Everybody's Column. It suggested that a planned co-generation project using methane gas from the landfill on River Road could be responsible for an increase in "the amount of radon extracted and dispersed to the air."

Not necessarily so. Under a pending federal law, the New Source Performance Standards for landfills, landfill operators must install extensive gas control systems. The collected gas can then be routed to a flare for combustion or to co-generation equipment for energy recovery. Active gas control systems installed to comply with the new source rules will be very similar to collection systems installed for co-generation projects. Emissions from these two systems will be similar.

BFI is proposing a co-generation project with back-up flare. Co-generation means the gas will fuel a generator to produce electricity for the Town of Tonawanda Wastewater Treatment Plant, reducing the dependency on fossil fuels and saving town taxpayers a considerable amount of money. Without a co-generation project, the gas is simply burned at the flare. Both flar-

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ing and co-generation are controlled and require air permits.

The letter also skews the real economics of this project. The electricity savings to Tonawanda are about \$13.5 million over the life of the contract. The implication that BFI gets "free methane" and is "pocketing over \$33 million in gross payments" is clearly misleading. Methane is not free. It takes an expensive collection system to remove the gas from landfill, and millions in system operating expenses over the life of the contract. Also, system maintenance, labor, repairs and construction costs are millions of additional dollars.

All of this quickly adds up. Yes, it is a good investment for BFI and the town, but not to the extent implied.

BFI and the Town of Tonawanda

began the gas project fully aware of the radioactive waste that was deposited from the Linde facility. BFI went to the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the federal Department of Energy. We met in July 1993 and have letters — available for inspection — stating the proposed landfill gas control system can be operated in compliance with radiologic standards and guidelines.

BFI is planning to install wells outside of the radioactive areas, which account for a small area within the landfill. After the radioactive material is removed by DOE or further analysis, shows that there is no threat, future wells may be proposed.

BFI and the Town of Tonawanda will work with all regulatory agencies to move this project forward in a safe and orderly manner, so that an otherwise wasted fuel source can be utilized in a way that helps the environment and saves the Town of Tonawanda about \$13.5 million in electrical bills over the next 20 years.

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