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Lehigh Cement Co.'s permit proposal gets public airing

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Dave Dreyer, plant manager of Lehigh Cement Co. in Glens Falls, kicks off a presentation about the plant's proposal to burn raggertail Wednesday night at The Queensbury Hotel.

Gwendolyn Craig, gcraig@poststar.com

GLENS FALLS — Wednesday night's snow didn't keep several dozen people away from an informational meeting about a local cement company's plan to burn paper and plastic.

Postponed last month due to the weather, the long-awaited meeting hosted by Lehigh Cement Co. at The Queensbury Hotel provided local lawmakers and residents an overview of a proposed update to the company's air emissions permit.

The presentation was not followed by an open question-and-answer forum, but rather stations were set up for the audience to disperse and ask their questions to individual experts.





Glens Falls residents express concern about burning raggertail

Plant Manager David Dreyer kicked off the presentation, explaining the company's 125-year history in Glens Falls. Showing an aerial photo of the plant, he said it covers two counties and three towns, with its quarry in Moreau and the plant straddling Queensbury and Glens Falls.

Just one of two cement companies in the state, Lehigh makes about 560,000 tons of cement each year.

An assembly of employees from the Glens Falls plant and from Lehigh's parent company, Heidelberg Cement Group, were also present.

In from Dallas, Environmental Director for Heidelberg Cement Group Adam Swercheck spoke about the plant's emissions controls and regulations.

Lehigh has been looking at raggertail, a 60 percent plastic and 40 percent paper alternative since 2016. Swercheck held up a cardboard box with some tape around it to show the audience what the material looked like before it's processed. Audience members could then see at breakout session tables examples of the confetti-like scraps that cardboard box is turned

In 2017, the plant invested in an alternative fuel handling system, allowing trucks to pull up and directly dump the raggertail with no outside handling required. It then moves through the enclosed system to the kiln, where it is mixed with either natural gas or coal as part of the kiln heating process.

Swercheck said the plant expects about 15 percent of its overall fuel mix to be raggertail, should its air permit revisions be approved by the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

A 2017 study done by a third-party environmental testing firm showed the use of raggertail continued to keep the plant's emissions below state and federal allowable limits.

While some have expressed concern over dioxin levels, cement company staff explained that the kind of plastic burned in the process is not coated in chlorine, which is an ingredient in making dioxin. Dioxin is a toxin that causes cancer.

While the plant does emit low levels of dioxin and mercury, it comes from the limestone and coal, not from raggertail.



Raggertail, a mixture of plastic and paper, is seen on Dec. 4 at the Northeast Cement Co. in Glens Falls. The company is looking at the alternative fuel.

Gwendolyn Craig file photo, gccraig@poststar.com

Five times a minute, Lehigh monitors mercury, total hydrocarbons, dioxin, particulate matter, carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide and opacity. The DEC and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency get reports during different time frames, depending on the pollutant.

There are also several control measures the plant puts in place to minimize its air emissions. Swercheck continued. Some include the use of activated carbon to reduce mercury emissions and bags that collect dust.

Swercheck said several other of Heidelberg's plants are currently using alternative fuels, some of which are more inconsistent than raggertail. The cement company continued to say that the use of raggertail keeps the product out of landfills and helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Some local lawmakers, including Queensbury Supervisor John Strough and Glens Falls Ward Councilwoman Diana Palmer, said they thought the meeting was helpful and answered many questions the public had.

Others, like Glens Falls Sustainability Committee member Tony Krivitksi, thought a lack of an open question-and-answer session was a "clever tactic" and kept the meeting from getting too emotional.

"It does dilute, I think, what might have happened," he said. "There's obviously some people who are pretty uptight about it."

During the meeting, a few questions were called out. Some audience members were given direct answers and some were asked to pose their question outside of the presentation. One audience member said she thought it would be better to hold a question-and-answer forum.

Another meeting attendee called out that the cement company was doing a good job and want an open forum because “we don’t want to be here all night.”

The DEC is still accepting comments on the proposal through March 15.

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To review the permit and submit a comment

Lehigh's draft permit and modification application is available on its website at lehighhanson.com/reference/glensfallsnyaddendum or at Crandall Public Library.

Comments and requests for a public hearing must be submitted in writing to the DEC by March 15. Comments should be sent to Beth Magee, DEC Region 5 Warrensburg Sub-Office, 232 Golf Course Road, Warrensburg, NY 12885; or emailed to DEP.R5@dec.ny.gov.

More online

See a copy of Lehigh Cement Co.'s Alternative Fuel Proposal handout poststar.com

Blog: Lehigh presentation was helpful, but missed the Q&A

MORE INFORMATION

Lehigh Cement Co. to answer questions about air permit at Wednesday meeting

- Concerned over air quality, citizens press expert for answers
- Lehigh Cement informational meeting postponed, rescheduled
- Lehigh Cement to hold public meeting on permit change
- How's the air in Glens Falls? It's hard to say
- Queensbury, Glens Falls, South Glens Falls join forces to gather information about raggertail
- DEC extends public comment period for Lehigh Cement's air permit change
- South Glens Falls asks Glens Falls for environmental help
- Blog: Glens Falls mayor asks DEC for more time to review cement plant permit changes
- Officials question cement plant's study results of burning paper-plastic mixture

- South Glens Falls appalled by cement plan test results
- Some officials ask DEC to extend public comment period on cement company's air permit
- Glens Falls cement company looks to update air permit

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