

Lehigh Cement Co. Gets DEC Permission To Use Alternative Fuel Source For Production

August 15, 2019

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Lehigh Cement Co. received state approval for a modification to its state air emissions permit.

Courtesy of Lehigh Cement Company LLC

by Christine Graf

Lehigh Cement Co. LLC in Glens Falls received state approval in July for a modification to its state air emissions permit.

The company said it allows them to begin using an alternative fuel in addition to natural gas and coal.

The application was submitted in November to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

According to company spokesman John Brodt, “We had asked for a modification to our state air emissions permit that would allow us to begin using an alternative fuel in addition to our current fuel sources which are natural gas and coal. This is fuel that is used to fuel our cement kiln to produce our product. We have the ability to burn either one of those fuels or both at the same time. We make our selections based on cost, market price, and availability.”

Preparation is currently underway for Lehigh Cement to begin using an alternative fuel product called “ragger tail.” It is made up of 60 percent plastic trimmings and 40 percent paper/cardboard fiber.

“It’s a mix of recycled corrugated cardboard fiber and the plastic based tapes, labels and wrappings that are commonly found on corrugated boxes,” said Brodt.

Ragger tail is a byproduct of the corrugated cardboard recycling process. During this process, boxes are placed in

giant vats of water. As the cardboard breaks apart in the water, it reverts back to fiber. The plastic tapes and labels that were adhered to the boxes detach and wrap around a mechanism that rotates around the vat.

“When they pull that material, it is a combination of plastic material and cardboard fiber,” said Brodt. “It comes out with a tail-like appearance.”

Companies that produce corrugated cardboard use the pulp from the recycling process to make new boxes. The ragged tail that traditionally ended up in landfills is now sold to recycling companies. It is dried out and converted into an alternative fuel product.

“Our interest in using this material is that it is lower cost than coal and natural gas,” said Brodt. “It will help reduce our energy costs which are a significant portion of our overall costs. It will help keep our Glens Falls plant competitive in what is increasingly a global market for cement. It’s going to reduce our use of fossil fuels. It will keep the material out of landfills, and it will do all of these things while still keeping our air emissions below our currently permitted levels.”

Lehigh Cement has not yet introduced the use of ragged tail into their production process. Before that can happen, they must first make changes to their production systems. Brodt said this will require the company to make a “fairly significant” investment.

“We are going to need to do some preparatory work to get the system ready to accept it. At time of testing—to verify it was

going to work well and to do the emission tests that were necessary in order to apply for our permit—we constructed a temporary system to feed the product into our processes,” he said. “We need to do some additional work to make that system permanent. It was constructed for the purposes of these tests.”

The company has received approval to use ragger tail at a level of up to 15 percent of the total fuel mix. It will be burned in addition to the coal and natural gas that are currently being used.

According to Brodt, the use of ragger tail as fuel is fairly new in the U.S. When it comes to the use of alternative fuels, he said European companies are “far ahead.”

The environmental impact of burning low carbon fuels (LCF) including ragger tail, has been studied in recent years. In 2016, a study commissioned by Lafarge Canada Inc., Canada’s largest supplier of construction materials, concluded that the use of LCFs demonstrated “an overall positive affect on the environment.”

Lehigh Cement has been producing cement in Glens Falls for more than 125 years. They claim to be the longest continuously-operated cement manufacturer in the United States and one of just two cement plants remaining in New York state The company was acquired by Germany’s Heidelberg Cement Group in 1977.

Approximately 100 employees work at the Glens Falls facility at 313 Warren St., where cement is produced using limestone from the company's quarry in Moreau.