

## Aries the ‘solution to PFAS’ or the source?

Company seeks support for gasification plant at public form on March 24

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TAUNTON — Is Aries offering the best solution for sludge treatment that Taunton can get?

That’s what it’s aiming to illustrate. But opponents say not so fast. With its proposal to build a waste gasification plant on top of Taunton’s landfill, Aries Clean Technologies is jumping head-first into outreach by hosting an upcoming public forum on Thursday, March 24.

It will be an opportunity for the company to try to garner public support and address criticism of the project. All previous interactions with the public were either through virtual meetings or presentations to the City Council.

“Aries is excited about this project. There are a lot of benefits, and we want to show it will be good for the city,” said Aries director of Business Development for New England Mark Lyons.

But just as Aries has moved forward over the last year with getting this project off the ground at both the state and municipal levels, so has opposition.

“It’s like they’re using Taunton as guinea pigs. No one knows what the results of their process will be,” said Nancy Clark, Taunton resident and member of advocacy group Clean Air Taunton, which formed not long after Aries first brought its proposal before the City Council back in 2020.

**Concern over ‘forever chemicals’**



**From left, Nancy Clark, Clean Air Taunton member; Estele Borges, supporter and Taunton city councilor; and Lisa Field, Clean Air Taunton member, stand outside the entrance to the Taunton Landfill on East Brittonia Street, the site of a proposed gasification plant. DANIEL SCHEMER/TAUNTON DAILY GAZETTE**

What Clark and other members of Clean Air Taunton are referring to is the gasification process Aries will use to turn sewage sludge, into biochar, a charcoal used in fertilizers as well as mixed into concrete for construction purposes. It's a venture the company has stated would bring in millions of dollars of revenue for the city, 25 new full-time jobs, and properly deal with tens of thousands of tons of sludge in this region annually.

The biggest worry Clean Air Taunton and other advocacy groups have concerns the handling of PFAS chemicals, often referred to as "forever" chemicals. These toxic chemicals are found in hundreds of consumer products, as well as human sludge from sewage wastewater. PFAS chemicals don't break down and have been linked to a variety of illnesses.

"If this is a great solution, why aren't other communities lining up for it? It would be terrible if five years from now we learned that it has impacted this community. By then, the genie is out of the bottle," said Lisa Field, member of Clean Air Taunton, who pointed out that air emissions of PFAS from the facility wouldn't just affect Taunton, but also spread to Raynham and other surrounding communities.

"The impact on our community will be detrimental and the individuals compromised are the same individuals who are barely ever considered due to their social-economic status when projects like the Aries plant are presented to communities," said Tanya Lobo, founder and Executive Director of True Diversity, Inc., a Taunton-based group that advocates for diversity, equality, equity and environmental justice.

Lobo said True Diversity became allied with Clean Air Taunton because of the fear of PFAS emissions and the neighborhoods around the landfill being part of an environmental justice area "known for low-income individuals, people of color and language isolation."

Currently, the city transports its waste 150 miles to an incinerator facility in Connecticut. Annual transportation and disposal costs are just over \$1 million. Lisa field echoed Lobo's sentiment: "We can all appreciate that the city council and mayor are struggling with how to address waste, but in turn, we want to make sure it's a viable, sustainable solution with no impact on our neighborhoods."

### **Gasification as 'solution to PFAS' or source?**

But Lyons said Aries will destroy 99.9% of PFAS inside all biosolids.

"We are the solution to PFAS," he said.

Lyons also said all residual PFAS still remaining after gasification will be emitted from the facility by smokestack well below the established acceptable daily intake (ADI) levels for many of these PFAS chemicals.

"The emissions will be extremely safe," he said.

A chief criticism for the project, ever since the City Council entered into a Host Community Agreement with Aires in February 2021, is the proposal lacks science proving the safety of the process.

“I understand that there are limited options for treating the city’s sludge. At this time, I don’t think that Aries has developed a safe and proven solution to handle our sludge dilemma,” said Rosemary Moreau, member of Clean Air Taunton.

### **Only other plant not yet operational**

Waste-to-energy processes for managing trash and organic materials aren’t new concepts. However, the only other facility utilizing Aries’ patented technology for gasifying biosolids, located in Linden, New Jersey, is currently finalizing testing of its systems, but isn’t yet operational.

Recently, Aries Clean Technologies completed and submitted its Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR), for review by the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act Office (MEPA). The report delves more into the technical data around the company’s gasification process.

Lyons said the forum on March 24 will follow a science fair format, with assorted tables presenting various staff, engineers, and scientists from Aries and consultant firm Epsilon Associates who will be there to break down the science for members of the public.

### **Mounting concern over PFAS**

Public worry over the infiltration of PFAS chemicals into the air and water continues to grow, as evidenced by recent efforts at the state level to advance legislation to regulate them. While PFAS levels are regulated for water in Massachusetts, there aren’t any standards for it in the air.

Last month it was announced by the State House that a bill was being considered that would place a moratorium on all future facilities and manufacturing that would emit PFAS.

“Dealing with sludge is a significant problem, no question. From a public health perspective [the Aries proposal] is kind of a questionable solution. There isn’t enough science showing gasification will produce a safe way for disposing sludge. People are concerned about what they don’t know about this process,” explained Carol Doherty, State Representative (D-Taunton), who, along with Senator Marc R. Pacheco (D-Taunton), co-sponsored bill S.2655.

Rep. Doherty emphasized the bill is only meant to give time for regulators to develop health and safety standards for ambient levels of PFAS, as well as for data to be agreed-upon that supports construction of facilities like Aries.

Lyons called the bill “shortsighted” and believes it will “discourage innovative new technologies from being developed and built in Massachusetts.”

Said Doherty: “For me, I think a moratorium is right-headed legislation. We’re not saying we’re for or against; the bill is saying is there isn’t enough scientific evidence for this. We need more information to make a determination if this is a good approach.”

Lyons stated once the evaluation period with MEPA is done, Aries will start applying for all the necessary permitting from the DEP and assorted city departments. Once all permitting is achieved and a lease agreement with the city is finalized, construction could begin as early spring/summer of 2023.

Construction of the facility would take about a year to build with capital costs estimated at \$65-70 million dollars, not figuring for inflation. Assuming no delays, such as extended moratoriums, Lyons said the facility could be operational by mid-2024. Aries' public outreach forum will happen on Thursday, March 24, from 5 to 8 p.m., at the Bristol Community College Taunton Center, located at 2 Hamilton St. You can learn more at [https:// www.ariestaunton.com/](https://www.ariestaunton.com/).



**A rendering of the proposed Aries gasification facility in Taunton. ARIES CLEAN TECHNOLOGIES**