

Patch, Newark, NJ

Newark Activists Oppose Waste Facility: 'Stand Up, Fight Back'

A proposed facility in Newark would turn human waste into a substance known as biochar. But the plan is raising a stink for some residents.



Eric Kiefer, Patch Staff

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Aries Clean Energy is proposing to build a biochar production facility on Doremus Avenue in Newark, NJ. Above, a stock photo of biochar. (Photo: Gulthara/Shutterstock)

NEWARK, NJ — A proposed facility in Newark that would turn human waste into a charcoal-like substance known as "biochar" has caused an outcry among some local residents and activists.

If it gets approval from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the Newark Biochar Production Facility would be located off an existing site on Doremus Avenue near the lower Passaic River. It would process up to 430 wet tons of domestic wastewater treated biosolids a day from New Jersey and New York, which would be heated at 1,500 degrees, turned into biochar, and sold as a concrete thickener to construction companies, TAP Into Newark reported.

A spokesperson for Aries Clean Energy, the Tennessee-based company proposing the Newark facility, said emissions from the facility would be "well below state and federal standards" and that there would be "zero odors."

[Read the full article.](#)

It isn't Aries' first foray into North Jersey. In 2019, the company [got approval from the NJDEP](#) to construct New Jersey's first, biosolids-only gasification facility in Linden.

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CEO Gregory Bafalis said the company's "patented gasification system" will eliminate the need for environmentally harmful landfilling or incineration of biosolids, while producing "beneficial renewable energy" in addition to biochar.

See more information and construction updates for the Linden facility via Aries [here](#).

What is biochar? According to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA): "Biochar is black carbon produced from biomass sources [ie: wood chips, plant residues, manure or other agricultural waste products] for the purpose of transforming the biomass carbon into a more stable form (carbon sequestration)."

The material has been used for years around the world to fertilize soil, [the USDA states](#).

A Newark-based nonprofit has another word for the product that would be manufactured at 400 Doremus Avenue, however: "sludge."

As it has been in the past with other industrial facilities in the neighborhood, the Ironbound Community Corporation (ICC) has been a vocal critic of Aries' proposal.

"What does this mean for our community?" the group [alleged on social media](#) earlier this week. "Another solid waste facility ... new source of pollution ... more bad smells ... more trucks coming in and out."

"This is unacceptable – we are not disposable," the ICC wrote, urging residents to "stand up and fight back" by contacting Newark's mayor and city council members.

According to activists, the area has become a dumping ground for industrial facilities over the past decades.

One recent target of their frustrations has been the Covanta trash incinerator on Raymond Boulevard, which burns 2,800 tons of garbage per day from 22 municipalities in Essex County and New York City, and is a 15-minute drive from the proposed Aries facility.

- See related article: [The Color Purple: Newark Residents Fed Up With Incinerator Smoke](#)

Another source of activists' ire – a rendering plant on Wilson Avenue that recycled animal byproducts and grease – was hit with a lawsuit from the state in 2019 after residents filed a wave of complaints, alleging that persistent "animal carcass odors" were plaguing the neighborhood.

- See related article: [Newark Plant Sickening Community With Putrid Odors, Lawsuit Says](#)

In recent years, Doremus Avenue – the location of the proposed Aries facility – has [appeared on lists of "toxic sites"](#) and has seen [industrial fires and explosions](#). The proposed site is also located across the street from the Essex County Correctional Facility.

Aries' push to expand into Newark comes as New Jersey readies to ramp up its "environmental justice" efforts in the wake of a bill that [became law in September 2020](#).

The legislation changes the way the NJDEP issues some of its key permits, making it harder for the owners of major sources of pollution to build a new facility, expand an old one, or renew an existing permit in areas that are considered "overburdened."

To qualify, a neighborhood needs to have 35 percent low-income households, 40 percent minority households or 40 percent of households with limited English language proficiency. There are an estimated 310 municipalities with 4.4 million residents that could qualify under the new policy, officials said.