

GUEST OPINION BY COMMISSIONER RAY JUDAH
BIODIESEL RESPONSE

11-15-07

In response to City of Fort Myers Councilman Thomas Leonardo's exaggerated claims in the Nov. 8th editorial concerning the risks associated with the production of biodiesel I would like to be clear, concise and factual in my comments about the proposed biodiesel production plant at the Gulf Coast Landfill.

- Biodiesel is a renewable fuel manufactured from vegetable oils, animal fats and recycled cooking oils. Some of the advantages of biodiesel and biodiesel blends, compared to the petroleum derived diesel fuel it displaces includes:
 - It is nontoxic, biodegradable and suitable for sensitive environments
 - It displaces petroleum based fuels with an energy efficient fuel which is made in the US from either agricultural or recycled resources
 - It reduces global warming gas emissions
 - It can be used in most diesel equipment with no or very minor equipment modifications

- It is possible that the public may perceive that a biodiesel production facility is similar to a petroleum refinery where gasoline, diesel, heating oil and other petroleum based products are refined from heavy oils. ***Nothing could be further from the truth:***
 - Smokestacks and high pressure vessels ARE NOT used in biodiesel production
 - The biodiesel production process, technically called "transesterification" uses only low temperatures (typically lower than 200F), and atmospheric pressure processes, and low energy levels for mixing, blending, heating and product pumping.
 - The project footprint is very small, requiring less than 2 acres of land, and no buildings or structures taller than a typical single story warehouse building

- The flashpoint of a flammable liquid is the lowest temperature at which it can form an ignitable mixture in air. The flash point of gasoline is approximately minus (-40 F); that of conventional diesel fuel about 125F; and 100% Biodiesel (called B100) is above 265F. This means that ***biodiesel is much harder to ignite than any of the fuels we are commonly exposed to.*** This property does not hinder its detonation in diesel engines, where the fuel is vaporized and highly compressed, but renders it much safer than conventional fuels to handle, store and dispense.

The existing situation at the Landfill provides for the open combustion of landfill gas at the flare. The proposed operation of the plant would use that gas in the production of biodiesel negating the need to flare the methane into the atmosphere (i.e. the surrounding neighborhoods). Ultimately the biodiesel produced in this plant will be used in County vehicles reducing CO2 emissions in the vehicle exhaust by up to 78% compared to petroleum based diesel. The use of biodiesel as an alternate fuel in Lee Tran and school buses will not only reduce harmful emissions, but substantially reduce fuel costs resulting in greater protection of the environment and costs savings to the taxpaying public. Furthermore, the use of grease from restaurants as feed stock for biodiesel production will minimize maintenance costs of wastewater treatment facilities and utilize grease as a resource rather than a waste product.

Taken as a whole, these facts make the danger to citizens living near a biodiesel production facility considerably lower than those associated with visiting or living near a gas station.

The biodiesel plant reflects well on Lee County's cutting edge leadership in continuing to provide responsible management of solid waste and supporting alternative energy technology, resulting in environmental and economic benefits with no risk to the public.