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## It's up to DEP to carefully review plant

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So far, debating a proposed \$235 million tires-to-energy plant has featured more opinion than fact about whether the project can create economic opportunities without harming the environment.

But now that Erie Renewable Energy LLC has filed an air-quality permit application, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection will start what is expected to be a lengthy and careful analysis of the project.

Our position regarding this controversial plant, which is proposed for the former International Paper Co.. site, will depend on the findings of the DEP.. If the state confirms what ERE officials have insisted all along -- that the plant will not pose an environmental threat -- this project should proceed under careful state and federal monitoring.

But if safety and environmental issues regarding tires-to-energy technology go unanswered or remain unclear, DEP should not hesitate to put the brakes on this project.

"This marks the beginning of a detailed process where the department will thoroughly review the application and take public comment," said Kelly Burch, regional director of the DEP.

The public has already heard warnings from Keep Erie's Environment Protected, which has fueled opposition to the plant.

Among the political leaders who oppose the plant's construction are state Rep.. Pat Harkins, of Erie, D-1st Dist., and Erie County Councilman Kyle Foust, of Harborcreek, who is also a Democratic candidate for the 3rd District seat in the U.S.. House of Representatives.

While we think Harkins and Foust should have waited for the plant's DEP filing and an analysis of the technology planned for the energy plant before deciding their positions, Foust made a good point in an Op-Ed article on Friday.. "The fact that ERE has not released specific information about potential pollution in great detail is alarming to me," he wrote.

While the company did properly file the permit application, it could have tried to answer some of the concerns about the technology.. Now it's up to the DEP to ferret out the truth while allowing the public to have its say.

ERE's plan calls for 60 good-paying jobs.. ERE also believes the plant's power and heat could attract more development while providing electricity for 75,000 to 80,000 homes

and possibly several area businesses.. The bottom line is the Erie region should continue to be patient as the analysis is done and the facts are revealed.