

BUZZ

CITY NEWS AND DEVELOPMENT FROM AROUND THE NATION



FT. PIERCE, FLA.

One County's Trash and Treasure

St. Lucie County, Fla. is planning to be the first in the country to vaporize a landfill at temperatures hotter than the sun. An Atlanta-based company, Geoplasma, claims that it will use plasma technology to incinerate 1,000 tons of St. Lucie's trash per day, once its proposed plant opens in 2011.

In plasma technology, garbage is dropped into a cupola and heated to 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit, vaporizing its contents into pressurized gas and steam, which can power a turbine to generate electricity. Geoplasma plans to sell the generated electricity back to St. Lucie's grid.

Company officials claim another

asset to plasma technology: emissions of nitrous oxide and sulfur oxides, two greenhouse gases, are lessened to a fraction of standard incineration.

But the St. Lucie facility will be 10 times the size of the world's largest plasma incinerator. That worries the Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR). They want Geoplasma to prove, among other things, that emissions will not harm public health.

In a guest column on a local Web site, three doctors from PSR urged the county to get hard facts before allowing the plant to go live: "There is no data from any such incinerator to verify that hazardous byproducts such

as dioxin, mercury and heavy metals will not be released." Dozens of other health and environmental groups oppose the plant.

St. Lucie County's solid waste assistant director Ron Roberts says they have already conducted toxicity tests on their vaporized trash and detected only cadmium. The only setback to plant construction is convincing more companies to buy the power it will generate. Roberts says the county has been on a crusade to "educate, educate, educate." Many people in the community are not yet comfortable with the technology.

—Hamida Kinge