

Report on Brig y Cwm Community Liaison Panel Facility Visit

Background to the Project

Covanta Energy is developing a proposal for a 750,000 tonne per annum Energy from Waste (EfW) plant to serve the residual waste treatment needs of Wales. The plant will be located near Cwmbargoed, in Merthyr Tydfil.

The proposed EfW facility will take waste from all across Wales, with approximately 75% of it being transported by rail. It is intended that the remaining 25% will be bought in by road from local areas. The plant will produce around 67MW (net) of electricity which will be exported to the National Grid. Covanta is also investigating how to make surplus heat from the process available to local homes and businesses to use for heating and industrial processes.

Background to the Community Liaison Panel

Covanta carried out an initial consultation for the project in 2009. During this consultation, Covanta issued invitations for members of the community to join the Community Liaison Panel (CLP). These invitations were issued at public information days, and via the press and local advertising. The CLP is comprised of 14 members in total, with representatives from each of the local county council areas (Caerphilly and Merthyr Tydfil). There are also some independent observers who regularly attend meetings, including representatives from the Environment Agency Wales (EAW) and the Head of Planning from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. The CLP is chaired by an independent chairperson (facilitator) who has no connection with the project and is not from the area. The chair for this CLP is Dale Hall of Opinion Research Services Ltd.

Aim of the Trip

The aims of the trip were for the members to see firsthand how Covanta's facilities are operated and monitored, including understanding the views of client authorities, regulators and the local community. The CLP was particularly interested in the setting of the facilities (agricultural/residential), the rail operations, and 'nuisance' issues such as odour and litter. It also provided the CLP as a whole with an impartial view of how Covanta operates its facilities.

How Attendees were Selected

The selection process was developed by the independent CLP facilitator and agreed by the CLP. The invitation to attend was extended to all, but with the expectation that selection would be required

to limit numbers to three representatives. Only two people put their names forward – others were not available due to job/family commitments or unwillingness to fly, and three local councillors ruled themselves out. The two members who attended the trip were Tyrone Powell (a local community representative) and Ray Baker (a retired Local Government Officer). In addition to the invitation to CLP members, the invitation was extended to the EAW to attend as independent observers. Although the invitation was initially accepted the EAW was subsequently not able to attend due to budget constraints.

Facility Information

Covanta Montgomery Inc. - Dickerson, Maryland

The Montgomery County Resource Recovery Facility began commercial operation in August 1995. The facility processes an average of 536,000 tonnes of solid waste each year, generating up to 63 MW of electricity, enough power for 40,000 homes. All waste is first delivered to the Shady Grove Waste Transfer Station (WTS) in Derwood (which the members also visited), compacted into steel waste containers and then loaded onto trains with gantry cranes.

Each day the trains make the 22-mile trip to the facility in Dickerson. There the containers are off-loaded and trucked from the on-site rail yard to the facility's enclosed reception hall. Residue that remains from the combustion process is then loaded into sealed containers and transported by rail to a specialty landfill located in Brunswick, Virginia.

The facility is located in a wealthy, agricultural region where the impact of the facility on crops and milk quality has been closely monitored since inception. The latest report from these studies is from June 2007 and concludes that "based on the available data...collected in the non-air media during the pre-operational phase (1994) and three operational phases (1998, 2001, and 2004) 2007 concentrations of PCDD/PCDF and metals are generally consistent with, or lower than, historical concentrations in previous monitoring program years... and there does not appear to be any evidence to suggest any increases in environmental media are attributable to RRF[Resource Recovery Facility] emissions."

Of note, the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) awarded the Montgomery County EfW facility its "2010 Gold Waste to Energy Excellence Award" the day the CLP was there. This award considers all aspects of waste to energy operations and represents the highest level of excellence among America's nearly one hundred facilities.

Covanta Fairfax Inc. – Lorton, Virginia

The I-95 Energy/Resource Recovery Facility began commercial operation in June 1990. It is Covanta Energy's largest facility, processing 894,000 tonnes per year of municipal solid waste for a population of 900,000 in the Washington D.C. suburbs of Fairfax County.

The facility sells up to 79 megawatts of electricity to Dominion Virginia Power Company – enough energy to meet the needs of 75,000 homes. It is the first Covanta Energy facility to have a non-ferrous metal recovery system.

Covanta Alexandria / Arlington Inc. – Alexandria, Virginia

The Alexandria/Arlington Resource Recovery Facility began commercial operation in February 1988 and serves about 300,000 residents of the County of Arlington and the City of Alexandria, which jointly own the site. The facility processes 290,000 tonnes of solid waste each year, generating up to 23 MW of electricity that is sold to Dominion Virginia Power Company. The facility is situated on a 2.3 acre site in a dense urban environment and is notable for its very close proximity to high value apartments, schools, and other community property much of which have developed since the facility began operations.

Choice of Facilities

The facilities were chosen to make sure the CLP members were able to see a number of different facilities in a short trip. Each of the facilities is located within an hour's drive of Washington D.C. which meant they could all be accessed over the two days allocated, with time for tours of the plant and questions afterwards. It was also important that the Maryland County and regional waste officials would be available to answer questions. The development of the tour was based around the Montgomery EfW facility and WTS, as this is a rail linked facility and offered the best representation of what the residents should expect at the Brig y Cwm (ByC) facility. The members had also expressed an interest in the Alexandria / Arlington facility because of its location in the centre of a city and the development of nearby, high priced apartments and a primary school. Finally the Fairfax facility is one of Covanta's largest facilities and gave the members an idea of how Covanta manages very large scale operations.

Attendees' Comments

The trip proved highly successful in fulfilling the aims of the CLP. Both CLP members felt they came away with a better understanding of Covanta as a project developer and the range of combustion,

emissions control and power generation technologies used. Mr. Powell and Mr. Baker both indicated that the trip had “put to bed a lot of myths and misconceptions”.

“One of the reasons I joined the CLP in the first place was because local residents told me about their concerns regarding the proposed ByC facility,” said Tyrone. “I felt that I needed more information before I could make my mind up and I thought this trip would be a great opportunity to see the process directly.”

Commenting on the trip Ray said “It was a real eye opener. I was very surprised with how pleasant the facilities were. They looked more like office blocks with the surrounding flower beds and tidy grounds. There were no smells and no dust.”

“All the facilities were very good and the locals don’t bat an eyelid,” said Tyrone. “High priced apartments and even a primary school have been built since the Alexandria / Arlington facility began operations. I was most impressed with how clean they all were, both inside and out. The floors were gleaming!”

“Covanta was completely transparent with us,” added Tyrone. “We were able to look all around the facility, from the tipping hall to the control rooms. All the staff we met were helpful, open and honest.”

“All of the staff seemed happy with their jobs and proud of their facilities. We were also able to meet the local officials who were competent and answered all of our questions,” said Ray.

Both members said they would strongly recommend a visit to other CLP groups.

“Some people think that Merthyr Tydfil is being ‘dumped’ on because we already have a nearby landfill and open cast mine, but this project is different. The trip was fascinating and provided me with the information I was looking for. It is a shame that not everyone can visit a facility,” said Tyrone.

“As long as the Environment Agency is happy with what is coming out the stack, there is nothing that I saw that would make me object to the proposal at ByC”, said Ray. “I found the trip very worthwhile and I would definitely recommend it. It’s like when you visit the Great Wall of China or the Pyramids – in real life, it’s never how you imagine it will be.”