

## Proposed Arecibo waste-to-energy plant gets EPA nod



Artist rendering of the the proposed Puerto Rico Renewable Energy Project in Arecibo.

**T**he proposed \$500 million waste-to-energy plant that Albany, NY-based Energy Answers is seeking to build in Arecibo got an important endorsement from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency earlier this week, when it approved a key permit needed to move the project forward.

In a letter sent to the proponent, the EPA determined the project meets stringent air standards in place to protect human health and the environment.

Energy Answers' proposed project, known as the Arecibo Puerto Rico Renewable Energy Project, will consist of two identical municipal waste combustors units a steam turbine-electrical generator, ash handling system, a carbon storage silo, a lime storage silo, an emergency diesel generator, an emergency diesel fire pump, one ammonia and three distillate fuel oil No.2 storage tanks, and a mechanical draft wet cooling tower.

Once operational, the facility will be capable of receiving up to 2,100 tons of waste per day to convert it into biofuel. At present, there are about 30 landfills on the island, most with limited lifespans left.

So, it would seem that the private initiative proposed for Arecibo, which requires no government financing for its construction or operation, would be a reasonable solution to the looming problem.

While the project has gotten the go-ahead from several local regulatory agencies, it has raised concerns among neighbors who fear for the harmful effects the plant's processes could have on their health.

"This preliminary approval is further validation of the approvals received from local agencies, that Energy Answers proposal is safe and capable of operating within all applicable standards," said Mark Green, director of the Arecibo project.

"We consider it a breakthrough for solid waste management in Puerto Rico and the production of alternative renewable energy," he said. "We're one step closer to having the opportunity to have a proven technology to convert waste into energy, new in the history of Puerto Rico, which will ensure environmentally responsible waste management with far less environmental impact than our current practices."

In its letter, the EPA said the preliminary permit is subject to public comment, after which a final determination will be made.

"We're confident this project is part of the real solution for waste management in the northern area and in turn have a positive effect on the economy of Arecibo and its neighboring towns by creating new economic development and jobs, which are badly needed in that region," Green concluded.