

'Proof, not promises' sought over energy plant

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Barely having breathed a sigh of relief after the Broga mega-incinerator proposal was aborted, activists believe they are up against another potential environmental disaster in the waste-to-energy facility planned in Sungai Udang, Malacca.

In the wake of a report that a RM612 million plant has been proposed by Melaka Waste to Energy Sdn Bhd (MwtE), they have demanded proof - not promises - of environmental safety and cost-efficiency.

"The technology provider for the Broga incinerator had made similar claims. They could not substantiate their claims when challenged," said DAP's non-governmental organisations bureau chief Ronnie Liu in reference to Japanese engineering firm Ebara Corp.

"Why should we believe MWtE?"

Liu was among activists involved in the four-year campaign against the massive incinerator planned for Kampung Broga in Semenyih, Selangor. Although said to have been scrapped, residents are [awaiting](#) the government's formal announcement.

MWtE and its partner Green Energy and Technology Sdn Bhd (GET) have claimed that their state-of-the-art 'plasma arc' technology is 100 percent [environmentally safe](#).

It said that - unlike 'conventional' incinerators - the plant will not release toxins and carcinogenic secondary products such as furans and dioxins or hazardous ashes.

Liu, however, said no one can claim 'zero' emission of toxic gases.

"The company has to prove this to us instead of assuring us with so-called facts and figures from the technology provider," he added.

Claims challenged

Backing him, US-based Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice executive director Bradley Angel challenged MWtE to show a similar facility or model that has not emitted pollutants into the air, land or water.

"My research and understanding of the technology has proven without a doubt that the claims of 'no pollution' simply cannot be accurate. Every plasma and gasification plant that has emissions data shows toxic emissions, often contradicting the public relations claims of the companies that they have no pollution," said Bradley in an e-mail interview.





"It is impossible to completely destroy and eliminate all waste being fed into a plasma arc facility without pollution, unless you are a skilled magician, which no one is."

Based on GET's own concept paper, the MWtE facility admittedly does release 'exhaust gases' into the atmosphere, pointed out Bradley who claims 21 years' experience in organising on the issue.

"You cannot claim you have a completely closed system AND admit there are exhaust gases and these are 'released to the environment'. It is one or the other, not both. Clearly by their admission there is burning, combustion and releases to the environment," he said.

Citing Greenaction's experience with a plasma arc technology company in the US, Bradley said Integrated Environmental Technologies' president Jeffrey Surma had in a public hearing 18 months ago admitted that its claims of having a 'closed-loop system' and of being pollution-free were untrue.

"Greenaction challenges (MWtE) to prove that they can do what no other company anywhere has been able to do: destroy waste with no emissions. We guarantee that if properly tested the proposed facility would have some level of toxic pollutants," said Bradley.

He also questioned claims that the MWtE facility would produce sufficient electrical energy for sale to local utility companies, third-party users and to run on its own generated energy.

Citing a meeting late last month with Ebara plant managers at the Nagareyama facility in Chiba prefecture, Japan, Bradley said his research has shown that companies using similar technologies are not self sufficient.

"Ebara had made the same claims in its advertisements, whereas they admitted (in the meeting) that they import electricity and use large amounts of kerosene to power their allegedly self-sufficient plant," he said.

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP), meanwhile, said it is alarmed to learn of proposal to build the plasma arc incineration facility in Malacca.

"CAP is saddened to note that, despite the lack of public support for incineration technologies as was demonstrated by the...Broga project, the government has decided not to heed the sentiments of its citizenry," said its president SM Mohamed Idris in a statement.

"CAP urges the public particularly, residents of Malacca and the state government to fully scrutinise and reconsider this extremely costly and polluting project which will clearly be a threat to public health and safety and reject it.

"Investment into waste management technologies that are safe, clean, green and generate renewable energy is the way forward to a more sustainable environment while protecting public health."