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Making a greenhouse gas into an energy resource

BY ANNE PICKERING
Staff Writer

LONDON GROVE — Pennsylvania's newest generator of green energy made its debut Tuesday with the grand opening of SECCRA Power — a landfill gas-to-electricity power plant at Southeastern

Chester County Refuse Authority's landfill on Route 926.

About 50 visitors, including two Chester County commissioners, donned earplugs as Richard Cairns, chairman of SECCRA's board of directors, turned the switch and the giant generator roared to life.

"What was once a nuisance gas is now a resource," said Cairns of the \$2.3 million project that will generate almost a megawatt of power — enough energy to power 500 homes.

Rachel Goldstein, regional manager of the Landfill Methane Outreach Program of the U.S. Environ-

mental Protection Agency, attended the ceremony. "This is the fun part of my job, to see the efforts of groups like SECCRA."

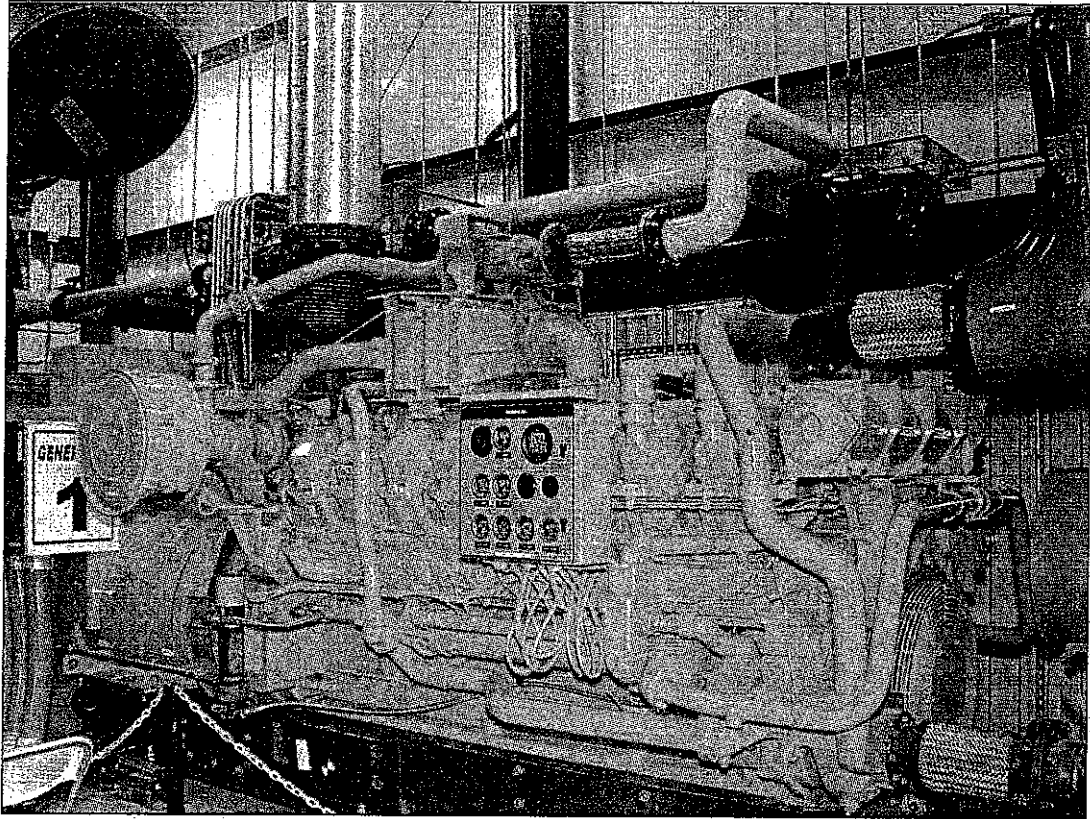
Since 1994, there are 432 methane to power projects across the country.

Methane gas is a natural byproduct of landfills and is usually

burned off. As a greenhouse gas, it is 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide in trapping heat in the atmosphere.

The generator that started operations Tuesday will utilize about one-third to one-half of the methane produced at SECCRA. The

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Staff photo by Jaime Bube

The 16-cylinder engine that will take the methane gas from trash and turn it into energy at SECCRA Community Landfill is shown.

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plant is planning to start the permitting process to add another generator that will utilize the rest of the gas.

Chester County Commissioners Carol Aichele and Patrick O'Donnell were also on hand.

"I think the science is fascinating," said Aichele, "and it's a way to achieve two objectives — generating energy and reducing greenhouse gases. This landfill is setting an example for other landfills."

SECCRA received a

\$500,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Energy Development Authority in 2005 to help build the plant. It took five years to get the permit, said Cairns, and only six months to build. The plant will provide electricity to PJM Interconnection, a regional transmission organization that coordinates the movement of electricity to 13 states plus the District of Columbia. It is estimated that the landfill will produce methane gas for another 15 years.

The sale of electricity and the sale of renewable energy tax credits earned from the project are expected to pay back the full investment in

about seven years and then the income will be used to contain costs for SECCRA customers.

The project included construction of a gas collection system in the landfill, a generator that runs on methane, a power line connecting the plant to the grid and an electronic monitoring system.

SECCRA is a non profit municipal authority formed in 1968 to provide solid waste and recycling services to about 95,000 people who reside in the service area in southern Chester County.

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