

Iowans Worry about Fertilizer Plant Pollution

BURLINGTON, Iowa (AP) — Some southeast Iowa residents are concerned that plans to build a \$1.4 billion fertilizer plant between Fort Madison and Burlington could mean future air pollution and falling property values.

The Hawk Eye in Burlington reports (<http://bit.ly/QBqD7a> [1]) an air quality permit hearing Wednesday drew a much larger crowd than state environmental officials expected as local families streamed into a Burlington library meeting room, leaving many standing along the walls and in doorways.

Egyptian construction company Orascom Construction Industries is planning to acquire up to 500 acres of farmland just off U.S. Highway 61. The company plans to build a factory that that will have daily capacity to make up to 2,200 tons of anhydrous ammonia, which will be refined into nitrogen-rich fertilizer products farmers apply to fields.

Construction is expected to begin this year and be completed in mid-2015.

Much of the opposition to the project came from people like Sara Mackie, a registered nurse from Wever, who spoke about her 2-year-old daughter growing up in the plant's shadow.

"I'm not against jobs. I'm 110 percent for jobs," she said with tears in her eyes. "But I don't want my baby outside breathing that pollution in."

She and her husband took out a 30-year loan on their home near the plant site five years ago. She is worried its property value will plummet.

"Nobody's going to buy my house," Mackie said. "And I don't really want to stay there either, but I can't financially afford to leave."

Orascom Technology Manager Harrie Duisters said a new type of nitrogen oxide reduction system will be installed at the plant.

"This will be the cleanest fertilizer plant built in the United States, perhaps the world," he said. "We will be installing technology that has never been seen before in the U.S."

The federal Clean Air Act requires the fertilizer plant to have 23 air quality permits approved before construction can begin, said Chris Roling, an environmental engineer in the Air Quality Bureau of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Brad Ashton, a DNR environmental specialist, said the plant would emit particulates, which can be any mixture of organic chemicals, metals, soils or dust and nitrogen

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oxide created from combustion like the burning of natural gas used to make ammonia. The contaminants will not further degrade the air quality in the area and the plant will not exceed federal air quality regulations, he said.

David Phelps, the bureau's environmental program supervisor, said the DNR has the authority to shut the plant if there's a problem with emissions.

The state offered \$110 million worth of tax breaks, loans, job training funds and transportation improvements to get the company to build in Iowa. It's the largest single incentive package ever offered by Iowa to attract a project.

Supervisors in Lee County in southeast Iowa, where the project will be built, approved their own property tax incentive that is worth about \$130 million over 20 years.

Orascom has promised to create 165 jobs that will pay about \$48,000 a year. Company officials said a minimum of 1,000 jobs outside the plant will be needed for transportation and other support. In addition, about 2,500 construction jobs will be created.

The creation of jobs drew a number of union representatives to the meeting to counter the opponents. Lee County has one of the state's highest county unemployment rates at over 8 percent. The statewide rate was 5.2 percent in September.

"We're here to support this project," said Ryan Drew, a business representative of Operating Engineers Local 150. "They're giving local guys these jobs and that's all the assurance we need."

Steve Dowell of Iron Workers Local 577 said plant opponents should be thinking about their children.

"These are jobs for the future," he said.

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Information from: *The Hawk Eye*, <http://www.thehawkeye.com> [2]

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