

Company Plans to Turn Trash into Electricity

TECHNOLOGY: Samaha Group seeks a landfill to prove business concept.

By **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporter

A Sherman Oaks company wants to introduce a new waste-to-energy technology to the U.S. market.

Samaha Group LLC has partnered with Intec Energies GmbH in Germany to bring its system to the U.S. as a way to cheaply produce power from trash, extend the life of landfills and even contribute to the fight against climate change.

Sam Samaha, founder and chief executive of the San Fernando Valley company, said that while the system has not been deployed anywhere in the world yet, consultants that the firm has spoken to have been impressed after reviewing the technical data.

"There is no one that I have spoken with that was not impressed," Samaha said.

Samaha Group got a boost of sorts last month in the form of a letter of support from the Los Angeles County Environmental Programs Division. In its letter, the agency shared that the development of in-county, commercial-scale conversion technology facilities is a key element in the county's strategy for assuring long-term disposal capacity to meet the needs of more than 10 million residents and thousands of businesses countywide, according to a statement from the company.

L.A. County Public Works Deputy Director **Shari Afshari** called the letter a generic one that showed the county's support for the concept of conversion technology. It does not endorse any one company over another, she said.

"We don't know what they (Samaha Group) are proposing; we just know they are planning to have a conversion technology facility," Afshari said. "As they move through the process and we learn more about what they are doing and if it aligns with the permitting we need them to get, at that point we can even assist with that."

How it works

The Intec system starts at the waste facility where the garbage is sorted to take out the glass, stone and metals, leaving behind other waste such as medical waste and even used tires. The sorted waste is then dried and put through a bio-filter to reduce any smell. The waste is then put through a gasification process in a main reactor and two secondary reactors, to create gas and coke, a material used in cement production. The gas is used to power a turbine to make electricity. Some of the electricity is used to power the waste system, but most can be sold to the electricity grid.

The system is 95 percent emission free, and creates no odor or carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas identified as a leading cause of climate change.

Samaha Group will make money by selling the electricity it generates wholesale and through tipping fees, or the fee charged to dump waste at a landfill. According to a state study released in 2015, the average tipping fee in California was \$54 per ton with more than half of the state's landfills charging between \$36 and \$50 per ton.

"There is plenty of marginal profit and that will be shared among the partners," Samaha said.

Conversion technology can be helpful in the fight against climate change, said L.A. County's Afshari. It does so by diverting materials such as organic wastes that decompose and become greenhouse gases into a facility where the gas is captured and used for fuel, she said.

"If I am capturing those it is not going into the atmosphere and it is not turning into greenhouse gases and contributing to climate change

and global warming," she added.

Marketing strategy

Samaha called the Intec system "break-through technology" but an obstacle to its adoption is in cities, counties and states that don't know enough about it. To that end, the company is educating all three government levels about how its technology will extend the life of landfills.

Kenn Phillips, the chief operating officer at the company, said that four landfills have been identified as sites to place the Intec system on between 30 acres to 60 acres of land.

"We now have to sit down with the operator/owners and see if they would be interested in

doing something like this with us," Phillips said.

A well-known figure in the Valley, Phillips left his position as chief executive of the **Valley Economic Alliance** at the end of March. It was while at the Alliance that he first met Samaha, he added.

Samaha described Phillips as someone with a lot of knowledge and a great passion for the environment.

"He admired our concept. He was aware of it before he left the Valley Economic Alliance," he added. "He volunteered and wanted to be part of the team."

Although the technology is from a German company, Samaha said it was not financially feasible to commercialize the system there

beyond a pilot project. The United States is a much better country for the system because there is more trash generated here, he added.

Samaha Group LLC

HEADQUARTERS: Sherman Oaks

CEO: Sam Samaha

BUSINESS: provider of waste to energy conversion system

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: 1

NOTABLE: Has partnered with a German company, Intec Energies GmbH to bring its system to the U.S.



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