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[Home](#) ▶ [Local News](#) ▶ [Yabucoa WTE project taking shape](#)

Yabucoa WTE project taking shape



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Green Energy Renewable Solutions Inc. and Landfill Solutions of Puerto Rico announced Monday a joint venture to remediate and manage the Yabucoa municipal landfill that has been closed since 2011.

The remediation plan (as reported by CARIBBEAN BUSINESS on July 19) is designed to bring the landfill up to current operating standards and reopen the landfill for operations while developing recycling and waste conversion facilities.

Under terms of the agreement, the joint venture will provide immediate remediation of the Yabucoa landfill located on 50 acres in the southeastern tip of the island of Puerto Rico. The initial phase of the project includes slope stabilization, construction of new road access and internal roadways, and leachate, run-off and flood control to bring the landfill site in compliance with regulatory standards of the Solid Waste Management Authority, the environmental control authority in Puerto Rico. The venture expects to begin work on the site immediately and estimates that the landfill will reopen within 120 to 180 days.

Following completion of the remediation phase, plans include rapid development of a recycling facility and waste-to-energy conversion plant. The ultimate goal is to divert all incoming municipal solid waste for separation and processing to capture valuable recycle materials and convert the remainder to energy and fuels. The company believes the planned operations will reduce the volume impact to landfill by 90% or more when fully operational.

Green Energy and Landfill Solutions, LLC have been collaborating on this project since October 2011, and the signing of the formal agreement will make the two companies 50/50 partners in the venture company.

Additional terms of the agreement provide a 30-year lease of the landfill at no cost to the venture company, which had previously secured long-term municipal contracts to supply 500 tons of solid waste per day to the Yabucoa landfill from four Puerto Rico municipalities.

When completed the estimated \$100 million project will have a projected capacity to process at least 1,000 tons of solid waste per day. The estimated output of the recycle and recovery operations include an estimated 200 tons per day of recycle materials (recovered metals, plastics, quality paper and cardboard that can be reused for new product manufacturing) 350 barrels of sweet crude oil equivalent and up to 15 megawatts of electrical power output.

“We believe this joint venture is a tremendous opportunity to use our unique landfill diversion and energy conversion strategies to address the immediate needs of Yabucoa and the surrounding communities,” said Green Energy Renewable Solutions CEO Joe DuRant. “It is our belief that this operating facility will demonstrate our ability to dramatically improve the current waste disposal situation on the island of Puerto Rico.”

DuRant stressed that the agreement is supported by long-term contracts that are expected to provide short-term, stable revenues while the joint venture develops recycling and waste-to-energy plant capacity for both fuel and electrical output.

“Long-term power purchase agreements and robust demand for fuels in Puerto Rico make this a very attractive location,” he said.

The deal marks another chapter in efforts to improve the island’s dismal recycling rate and tap waste-to-energy (WTE) technology to take pressure off Puerto Rico’s landfills.

New York-based Energy Answers plans to build a WTE plant in Arecibo that would have the capacity to burn more than 2,000 tons of trash daily, producing some 80 megawatts of alternative energy in the process.

Energy Answers says the plant would pump nearly \$500 million into the island economy, and create 3,800 jobs during the construction phase and 150 permanent jobs once in operation.

After decades of discussion and little action about an impending solid waste crisis, Puerto Rico is finally cleaning up its own garbage. That’s not only great news for the environment but for the economy as well.

By October 2014, most of the island’s landfills could be shuttered, with only the few able to meet federal operating standards expected to remain open, according to an order issued last fall by the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board (EQB).

The order followed years of threats by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to close down Puerto Rico's municipal trash sites because of shoddy management, substandard design and disappearing storage capability that has made them among the island's greatest environmental threats, blamed for polluting underground water supplies and the air, and for devouring acres of precious land on this 100-by-35-mile island, acreage that remains unfit for most activity even decades after closure.

The local Solid Waste Management Authority (SWMA) says that unless something is done, Puerto Rico will run out of space to dispose of its trash by 2018. There are currently 28 landfills on the island, with four in the process of being closed. Most of the remaining landfills are expected to be shuttered over the next three years.

Meanwhile, Puerto Rico's recycling rate remains a miserably low 11.31%, despite a law calling for a 35% recycling rate by 2006, six years long past. Over the years, there have been numerous private-sector proposals for new, state-of-the-art landfills and waste-to-energy plants, but few new solid waste management infrastructure projects have been built over the years, a result of a lack of political will and the "not in my backyard" opposition that such projects generate.

Increased recycling could create an additional 1,300 jobs in that sector, according to official estimates.