

PRESS RELEASE



Planning Inspectorate accused of ignoring the health and safety of Milford Haven residents and workers in controversial biomass and waste gasifier application

Environmental campaigners have today sent an Open Letter denouncing the Welsh Planning Inspectorate's decision to limit the scope of a new consultation about Egnedol's controversial proposal for a large biomass and waste gasification plant at Blackbridge, Milford Haven and to exclude any new evidence and comments that relate to impacts on residents on workers [1]. In the letter, Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth, The Environment Network for Pembrokeshire (TENP) and Biofuelwatch are warning that planners' handling of Egnedol's application could be putting lives at risk.

The groups had previously written to the Planning Inspectorate in May, after Egnedol's application had been suspended for additional information, calling for a proper investigation into health and safety risks of residents and workers, as well as other important planning matter. The consultation has been re-opened, but the Planning Inspectorate has restricted consideration of comments to ones about local ecology impacts. This is despite the fact that the plant would be built inside two Control of Major Accident Hazard Zones and that its design contravenes European guidelines about biomass gasifiers, drawn up to reduce the risks of explosions and fires [2].

Bettina Becker from Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth says: "We are shocked and dismayed that the Planning Inspectorate and the Health and Safety Executive continue to turn a blind eye to the safety of residents and workers in Milford Haven."

While the TENP Committee agree that it is right and proper, that the Planning Inspectorate insists on scrutinising a power plant's impacts on otters and bats, but feel that the Inspectorate has failed to give adequate attention to the risks posed to people. Furthermore, that the decision making process has been handled so poorly that it has failed to apply the 3 principles adopted by the Planning Inspectorate and to fulfil the duty placed on public bodies by the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act, 2015, of which the Welsh Government is so proud.

European Commission guidelines stipulate that all biomass gasifiers must have an emergency gas flare, to prevent pressure from building up inside the gasification chamber during engine shutdowns. Egnedol's proposal shows that the company wants to build one of the biggest gasification plants in the world without any flare and thus any means of preventing a potentially catastrophic explosive buildup of pressure. The Health and Safety Executive has so far refused to step in and to scrutinise the proposal.

Almuth Ernsting from Biofuelwatch warns: "We had hoped that after the Grenfell Tower disaster, fire and explosion risks would no longer be sidelined by planners and the Health and Safety Executive. If the Planning Inspectorate is not willing to consider the evidence, then the Welsh Assembly Government must step in".

The Open Letter further warns that other vital issues, such as the health impacts of air pollution and compliance with waste policies, are also not being properly addressed through the planning process.

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Notes:

[1] The letter can be downloaded at biofuelwatch.org.uk/2017/egnedol-open-letter . Egnedol proposes to build a 49.9MW biomass and waste gasification plant. For more information on the scheme, see Biofuelwatch's briefing at <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Blackbridge-biomass-briefing-1.pdf> and the planning documents at <https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewCase.aspx?Caseid=3146073&CoID=0> .

[2] The European Commission's guidelines for biomass gasification plants can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/projects/sites/iee-projects/files/projects/documents/gasification_guide_final_guideline_for_safe_and_eco_friendly_biomass.pdf .