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Methane collection system at landfill in the works

By Bibeka Shrestha • Staff Writer

Haywood County officials are racing against the clock to get a methane collection system built at two landfills before the U.S. Senate gets a chance to pass the climate change bill.

Haywood County hopes to score points for installing methane collection, which would neutralize the otherwise volatile greenhouse gas that emanates from decomposing trash. In exchange for such a system, Haywood would like to earn carbon credits — a commodity which could then be sold to industries trying to offset their own pollution.

But Haywood's shot at carbon credits could be lost if The American Clean Energy And Security Act of 2009 passes first. The bill, which has already been passed by the House of Representatives, would mandate that landfills the size of Haywood's take steps to neutralize methane.

Haywood's effort would no longer be seen as a voluntary step — the county would merely be following federal orders. Thus, the county would not be able to sell the credits through the Chicago Climate Exchange, but would instead have to line up individual polluters willing to buy the carbon credits directly from the county.

Given the pressure, Haywood County hopes to have the system up and running by March or April 2010.

"I think realistically we could use that as a target," said County Manager David Cotton.

Commissioner Mark Swanger said McGill Associates has been contracted for preliminary work on the project.

"We're just going to proceed and start getting real numbers so we know exactly what we're looking at," said Swanger.

The firm estimates it would cost \$92,000 to install a methane collection system at both the White Oak landfill and the closed-down Francis Farm landfill. According to Swanger, Haywood could make enough off carbon credits the first five years to pay for the system and after that, it would be "all profit."

Depending on how much methane can be tapped, the county could install a generator to convert the energy from the burning methane into electricity. Francis Farm landfill — which was closed by the county several years ago — seems to be a site more likely to house such a generator than the currently open White Oak landfill, since it already has school bus garage nearby that could easily hook up to electricity generated by the landfill.

Putting that system up at White Oak would be "cost-prohibitive," according to Cotton.

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