

DEQ to hold air quality meeting on pellet plant

By Royce Armstrong, George County Times

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The proposed Enviva wood pellet plant to be built in the George County Industrial Park has hit an unexpected delay, County Communications Director Ken Flanagan told the George County supervisors Monday morning. Late last week the county received a letter from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality stating the public comment period for the air quality permit has been extended until mid-May.

Concerned citizens and environmental groups, including members of the Mississippi Chapter of the Sierra Club, will be given further opportunity to express any concerns during a public hearing to be held on May 14. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. and be held in the county Administrative Building, Flanagan said.

Enviva is the world's largest producer of high intensity wood pellets used as a renewable energy source for electric power generation. The pellets to be produced at the proposed George County plant will be used for electric power generators in Japan.

Environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, the Dogwood Alliance and others have opposed new construction and expansion of other Enviva plants, including most recently the expansion of the Hamlet, North Carolina plant last November. Environmental groups, which also oppose the use of fossil fuels such as coal and oil to generate electric power, claim producing and burning wood pellets release harmful amounts of carbon into the atmosphere.

According to its website, Enviva was founded in 2001 to provide a source of fuel cleaner than fossil fuels for electric power generation. It now operates seven plants in the U.S., producing more than three million metric tons of industrial grade wood pellets.

The meeting will be a DEQ meeting with a team from Enviva on hand to answer questions and concerns.

The DEQ air quality permit is the final step in the permitting process for approval of the \$130.00 million wood pellet plant.

"The Enviva project will have a tremendous economic impact on our County with 90 full time jobs and approximately 300 indirect jobs," said Board President Larry McDonald, in a previous interview. "This will also provide a much needed market for our timber industry".

George County ranks 68th among Mississippi's 82 counties in employment, with 6.6 percent of its work force looking for jobs.

The public is invited to the May meeting.

