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Locals & the Georgia Water Coalition oppose latest plastic incineration plant

Financial, toxic, fire threats raise concerns in Upson County

THOMASTON, Ga. –Today Upson County residents and the Georgia Water Coalition’s (GWC) plastic committee announced the formation of a new organization, Upson Environmental & Government Transparency LLC. The group formed in reaction to a proposed plastic pyrolysis facility in Thomaston, Georgia. The same company, California based Brightmark [previously attempted](#) to build a similar facility in Macon. This thwarted project was strongly opposed by local citizens and listed on the [GWC’s Dirty Dozen report in 2021](#). Brightmark is seeking a \$879 million bond from the county and millions of dollars in tax abatement.

“The estimate of 100 truckloads of plastic trash coming into our county everyday and thousands of trainloads of highly toxic materials leaving our county, plus the chance of a dangerous fire is not what I want for my community,” **said former Upson County Commission Chairman Rusty Blackston**. “I’ve raised a family here and been a part of this community for decades. This proposal is not a good fit.”

The proposed Brightmark facility would turn post-industrial plastic waste into the precursor of dirty liquid fuel to be burned. The energy-intensive process involves a [dangerous method](#) that generates significant pollution. Although the industry advertises the process as sustainable, with innocuous-sounding misnomers such as “advanced recycling,” similar facilities are so inefficient that processing one metric ton of plastic waste [creates at least](#) three metric tons of carbon dioxide. In

other words, the process uses more energy to turn plastic waste into fuel than the fuel itself contains.

Furthermore, melting plastic and converting it into the precursor for liquid fuels involves toxic substances such as hydrogen cyanide, benzene, formaldehyde and dioxins. These hazardous chemicals would pollute our air, our water, and our bodies and are often found in the emissions, waste byproducts and end products of facilities like what Brightmark is proposing.

“The environmental cost of these types of facilities is immense and does not qualify as ‘recycling’,” said [Jennette Gayer](#), **the state director of Environment Georgia and chair of the Georgia Water Coalition’s plastics committee**. “So-called ‘chemical recycling’ can be 10 to 100 times worse for the environment than creating brand-new non-recycled plastic.”

Brightmark’s only other U.S. plant— located in Ashley, Indiana— [caught fire](#) less than six months into operation and has also been contacted by the Indiana Dept. of Environmental Management for numerous violations*.

“The implications of what is essentially a new landfill and incinerator in Thomaston are deeply concerning,” said **Nick Grammer, an Upson County resident**. “The chemicals that will be used and shipped in and out of our community are highly dangerous. Brightmark's track record does not give me peace of mind for our community.”

In 2018, the Georgia legislature passed [HB 785](#), which allowed facilities like the proposed Brightmark plant to operate without a solid waste handling permit. This means Brightmark will be able to take in millions of tons of plastic from around the Southeast and store it on-site for as long as it likes.

“It is time to reject chemical recycling as a solution to plastic waste management,” said Jess Conard, Appalachia director at Beyond Plastics and a resident of East Palestine, Ohio. “Georgia leaders can protect community health and drive more meaningful action like policies that will invest in health and clean jobs, rather than a polluting chemical process with decades of financial failures.”

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