

My name is Rebekah Creshkoff, and I live in the town of Delaware.

Last month, Mark Baez mentioned that the Partnership for Economic Development is working on a potential project with Aries Clean Technologies, which maintains it can destroy PFAS in sewage sludge.

Whether the company can actually do that in real life is unclear.

According to Loretta Fernandez, an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northeastern University in Boston, thermal treatment like Aries' proprietary gasification process can break down PFAS. But it's not easily done, and may only partially destroy the chemicals.¹

What's more, the process requires high temperatures, making it extremely energy intensive. How will Aries power its operations?

Moving on: According to Aries' website, their plant in Linden, New Jersey, is "routinely operational."² To me, that means it's open for business and is currently processing municipalities' sewage sludge.

But according to a news article in the Taunton Daily Gazette, the facility ran in test mode for several months starting in December 2021. It went offline the following July.³

I recently spoke to someone in Linden with direct knowledge of the situation, and learned that the Aries plant is significantly behind schedule. They have encountered problem after problem, including some major engineering challenges that defy resolution. I can only sketch out a rough outline because the individual was concerned about losing their job.⁴

¹ Susannah Sudborough, "What do scientists say about Taunton gasification plant? Is it safe? Can we know?" The Taunton Daily Gazette (Mass.), April 27, 2021. <https://www.tauntongazette.com/story/news/environment/2021/04/27/taunton-aries-gasification-pollution-pfas-scientists/7346043002/>. Last accessed March 6, 2025.

² "Routinely Operational: Linden, New Jersey," Aries Clean Technologies, https://ariescleantech.com/case_studies/bringing-clean-sustainable-biosolids-gasification-to-new-jersey/. Last accessed March 6, 2025.

³ Daniel Schemer, "Taunton gasification proposal is back. Here's why it's still controversial." The Taunton Daily Gazette (Mass.), April 17, 2023. <https://www.tauntongazette.com/story/news/environment/2023/04/17/taunton-ma-aries-sludge-biosolids-gasification-plant-opposition/70105663007/>. Accessed Feb. 27, 2025.

⁴ Personal communication, Feb. 27, 2025.

What about financing? Seventy-five percent came from the sale of “green” tax-exempt bonds issued through the Union County Improvement Authority. Such bonds, said Aries’ then-CEO Greg Bafalis in December 2019, “are used for projects done by private companies for public good, such as wastewater treatment.... We qualify because we’re taking the biosolids.”⁵

Initially, the county issued \$50 million worth of bonds in October of 2019.⁶ But given all the problems at the Linden plant, Aries has repeatedly returned to the improvement authority for additional funding.

The county has been throwing good money after bad, using taxpayer dollars to keep the project going. They issued \$11.5 million worth of bonds in April 2021, an additional \$8.5 million in December 2023, and committed to up to another \$21.5 million last November.⁷ That adds up to \$41.5 million on top of the original \$50 million.

Last month, Mr. Baez said that Aries is a big ratable, and has a good payroll and jobs structure, too.⁸ But in 2019, Waste360.com wrote that the Linden plant would create 60 temporary construction jobs. Just 16 long-term, skilled jobs would be required to operate the plant.⁹

I appreciate that the loss of Frito-Lay and Catholic Charities’ outpatient treatment unit has hit workers and the county hard. But as we look to find other businesses to replace them, we need to scrutinize potential partners closely, lest we later suffer buyer’s remorse.

⁵ Ben Messenger, “Aries Clean Energy: Taking Gasification Mainstream in the US,” Waste Management World, Dec. 3, 2019. <https://waste-management-world.com/artikel/in-depth-aries-clean-energy-taking-gasification-mainstream-in-the-us/>. Last accessed March 6, 2025.

⁶ Arturo Santiago, “Aries Linden Biosolids Gasification Facility Reaches Financial Close,” Waste Today, Nov. 5, 2019. <https://www.wastetodaymagazine.com/article/aries-linden-biosolids-gasification-facility-reaches-financial-close/>. Last accessed March 6, 2025.

⁷ Resolution No. 71-2024, “Resolution Amending the Bond Resolution Adopted on March 5, 2024 - Bond Resolution Supplemented the Bond Resolution Which Authorized the Issuance and Sale of Solid Waste Disposal Subordinated Revenue Bonds (Aries Linden, LLC Project) Series 2023,” Union County Improvement Authority, Nov. 6, 2024. <https://ucimprovementauthority.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/71-2024-Amending-Bond-Resolution-31-2024-Private-Placement-Bonds-Linden-Aries.pdf>. Last accessed March 6, 2025.

⁸ Sullivan County Legislature Economic Development Committee meeting, Feb. 7, 2025. <https://sullivancountyny.granicus.com/player/clip/1842>. Last accessed March 6, 2025.

⁹ Aries Breaks Ground on New Jersey Biosolids Gasification Facility, Waste360, Oct. 21, 2019. <https://www.waste360.com/waste-to-energy/aries-breaks-ground-on-new-jersey-biosolids-gasification-facility>. Last accessed March 6, 2024.