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Update on Berkeley County's recycling program

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JAN 16, 2023



Inside a portion of Repower South's facility before opening in 2019.

FILE/STAFF: MATT BIASE

The lack of blue recycling bins across the county gives some the impression that Berkeley doesn't have a recycling program — but don't fret, it does and it will continue at the landfill for the foreseeable future.

It has taken a while, but there is finally an update on Berkeley County's recycling initiative. After going without a program, for a time, the county decided in 2018 to get into a private-public partnership with a company offering an ambitious, proprietary method to turn trash into cash.

On its own dime, Repower (RPS), leased county land and constructed a 100,000 square-foot building at the site off Highway 52 in Moncks Corner.

Inside, a maze of conveyors moves the garbage along to be sorted, pulverized, shredded, flattened and stacked.

Repower states it has invested close to \$60 million to be county's recycling program. The company sorts, blue-bin materials like metal, plastics mixed paper and cardboard and sells it for a profit. Your waste is their reward. The garbage just has to get out to the curb.

The company can also do something with the trash that can't be recycled. RPS can take the non-recyclable papers and plastics and make that into an engineered fuel that works as a replacement for coal.

Repower reports a cement company in Holly Hill currently uses the material, replacing the coal used in their manufacturing process. The initial agreement with Berkeley is that the county gets a cut from the money made from the commodity and fuel sales once RPS made a certain amount.

At the Jan. 10, Berkeley County Council meeting, Repower's CEO, Brian Gilhuly gave his first update in a public forum regarding the state of the business relationship. Gilhuly told the governing body that the company experienced no long-term shut downs and no permit violations on monthly inspections by South Carolina DHEC.

And along with the 12 to 15 percent of things that RPS states is actually being recycled, the capacity of the landfill could be extended by decades.

“I want the public to know there is a lot of risk involved, but County Council took this on to have recycling countywide,” said council member Josh Whitley. “If you throw a piece of trash away, you are participating in a recycling program, in a public and private partnership. And so I think it was a win then and I still view it as a win now.”

Other County Council members and County Supervisor Johnny Cribb, also gave Repower some props for its approach to recycling and thinks the public should take some time to learn more about the program. As for now, it seems safe to assume Berkeley County leaders are not ready to throw it all away for a blue bin, just yet.

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