

FEATURED

Brightmark Energy moving along on schedule with Ashley plant

By Mike Marturello mmarturello@kpcmedia.com

Aug 18, 2019



Brightmark Energy CEO Bob Powell stands in front of the waste-to-fuel plant the company is building near Ashley on Tuesday. It will be the first plant of its kind on a commercial scale.

photos by Mike Marturello

ASHLEY — It had rained on Monday, dumping some 3-4 inches in the Angola area and parts of Steuben County to the south.

On Tuesday the ground was still wet and a tour of the Brightmark Energy plant was taking place with company officials from San Francisco. None of this seemed to phase Forrest Grosteffon, the project manager overseeing the construction of the Brightmark Energy waste-to-fuel plant just east of Ashley.

He's seen it before, dating to when the company broke ground in May at this plant where hundreds of tons of waste plastic annually will be converted to low-sulfur diesel fuel, wax and naphtha.

Grosteffon actually reversed the construction schedule for Brightmark, putting up the building first then will eventually follow with a tank field that will do the business of processing the plastics.

“It was so saturated wet we had to flip our schedule and we are on track,” Grosteffon said.

Staying on schedule on a major construction project in Steuben County this year is nothing short of a miracle. Just in Angola where official National Weather Service climate data is recorded, precipitation is about 10 inches above normal for this time of year, at 33.20 inches as of Friday. That’s almost equal an entire year’s amount of precipitation.

Like last year, highway projects and construction in general are running behind.

But not at this site that’s adjacent the Klink Group of Companies. On Tuesday, there was water all around. The oversized storm water detention pond was getting a workout. Water was standing in several other spots.

Not so at the construction site. Grosteffon said work done by JICI Construction of Angola has made sure the site has not been so wet that work could not be conducted. On this Tuesday, there was a flurry of activity and construction vehicles could move with ease on the various limestone drives around the site.

There will be 13 bays in the 112,000-square-foot steel building and 11 have been constructed. Work is moving along at a decent clip. Grosteffon is happy.

Brightmark’s CEO, Bob Powell, seems pleased with the progress, too, and he reached out to JICI President Ken Wilson to thank him for a job well done so far while touring the site on Tuesday.

While he’s happy with the progress, you can tell Powell wants to see those tanks on site that will do the patented waste-to-fuel conversion process that will done for the first time ever on a commercial scale. It’s a process that’s heralded as one way to help rid the nation of its buildup of plastic refuse that no longer has a useful life, not even able to be recycled.

There will be six, 8-by-60-foot tanks in an array east of the building. Each tank will process some 25 tons of plastic waste a year. There will be four tanks working at a time, 24 hours a day.

“That’s the uniqueness of the process,” Powell said.

All of the plastic that will be processed at the plant will be kept indoors so it will be dry when it is fed into the tanks to be vaporized. It is then fed into the tanks for their conversion using a process known as pyrolysis. The tanks are known as pyrolyzers.

A test pyrolyser is currently located at a facility in Elkhart but will eventually be moved to Ashley, perhaps later this summer or early fall.

The Ashley facility will be the first of its kind to take mixed-waste, single-use plastics and convert them into usable products at commercial scale. The facility will initially convert approximately 100,000 tons of plastics into more than 18 million gallons a year of ultra-low sulfur diesel and naphtha blend stocks and nearly 6 million gallons a year of commercial grade wax in a process that is expected to be 93% efficient.

BP will purchase the fuels produced by the facility, and AM WAX will purchase commercial grade waxes produced in the process.

Plastic waste from the Ashley site has been collected at one corner of the property. Rather than landfill the material, it will be put through the plant, said Chrystal Boone, Brightmark vice president of marketing. Most of the plastic is corrugated drainage tile that has been dug up on site.

A total of 136 full-time manufacturing jobs will be created when all phases of the facility are operational. Initially the plant will start off with 70 employees when it starts operations late in 2020.

“We do eventually plan to expand the site,” Powell said.

The plant will use a state-of-the-art plastics-to-fuel process that sustainably recycles waste that has reached the end of its useful life — including items that cannot readily be recycled, like plastic film, flexible packing, styrofoam and children’s toys — directly into useful products. Ultimately, the outputs of this technology could also be used to produce the feedstocks necessary for manufacturing plastic again, thus creating the world’s first truly circular economy technology for plastics.

In April, Brightmark closed a \$260 million financing package for the construction of the plant, which includes \$185 million in Indiana green bonds. As part of the financing closing, Brightmark became the controlling owner of RES Polyflow, the Ohio-based energy technology company that innovated the process for converting plastics directly into transportation fuel and other products. RES Polyflow started working with Ashley and Steuben County officials on the project in 2015. The project has been in development some 10 years.

Brightmark Energy develops, owns and operates waste and energy projects that employ technology solutions including plastics to renewable resources and renewable natural gas solutions for its customers and partners. Brightmark’s mission is to create significant long-term value and a positive global impact by delivering waste and energy solutions. Brightmark’s subsidiary, RES Polyflow, designs, manufactures and implements commercial scale energy recovery systems that offer a responsible end of life solution for non-recycled waste plastic. Learn more at brightmarkenergy.com.

People wanting to see a time-lapse view of the Brightmark construction project may see it at brightmarkenergy.squarespace.com/plasticstofuel.

