

Colorado Leaders Consider Converting Waste into Natural Gas



Leaders from across the state gathered in Denver to learn more about turning human waste into natural gas, which is how Grand Junction currently fuels 40 city vehicles. (City of Grand Junction)

May 20, 2016

DENVER - Raw sewage rarely draws a crowd, but former Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter joined city leaders from across the state in Denver on Thursday to learn more about turning human waste into natural gas.

David Cox, director of operations for the Renewable Natural Gas Coalition, said turning waste into fuel actually can lower greenhouse-gas emissions that otherwise would be released on farms, landfills and water-treatment facilities.

"Renewable natural gas provides an opportunity to convert everyday waste into transportation fuel or renewable electricity," he said. "This can be part of Colorado's solution to smog and air pollution, to combat climate change, to stabilize fuel prices."

Cox said the same energy extracted by drilling deep into the earth can be harvested from landfills and sewage because, regardless of where organic matter decomposes, methane - the primary component of natural gas - is released. Since methane is more than 80 times more powerful at trapping heat than is carbon dioxide, he said, redirecting emissions into a pipeline could help reduce climate pollution.

Cox pointed to the city of Grand Junction as one example of how renewable natural gas can provide cleaner energy for transportation. He said the city's Persigo Wastewater Treatment Plant already transforms more than 8 million gallons of sewage into fuel for some 40 vehicles.

"They're capturing their waste gas at their wastewater treatment plant," he said. "They're fueling their city's vehicles - refuse trucks, street sweepers, dump trucks and sedans."

Because the conversion process ends up paying for itself, Cox said, Colorado has an opportunity to replicate Grand Junction's efforts across the state. With shale production declining, he said, tapping Colorado's energy infrastructure for renewables could be something that anti-fracking activists and the gas industry can agree on. The conference was co-sponsored by Energy Vision and the Denver Metro Clean Cities Coalition.

Eric Galatas, Public News Service - CO