

Group has doubts about ethanol plant

The proposal by Didion Milling of Cambria has spurred concerns about air quality, traffic and noise.

By Deborah Kades
Business reporter

A group in Cambria wants residents to think hard about an ethanol plant proposed for the village's south side.

To share data and gauge opinion, Cambrians for Thoughtful Development planned an informational meeting for Monday night.

"We're trying to focus on questions that have to do with our quality of life in Cambria," said John Mueller, one of the meeting's organizers.

He said the group questions the impact of an ethanol plant

on air quality, noise and traffic in the village of 792 people.

Corn processor Didion Milling has proposed building an ethanol plant at the company's current location in Cambria, about 50 miles northeast of Madison, said general manager Dale Drachenberg. The plant would transform corn into 20 million gallons of ethanol a year.

Ethanol is a liquid that is blended with gasoline to make a cleaner-burning fuel for vehicles.

Didion Milling officials hope to start construction in the spring and have the plant operating by January 2004, Drachenberg said. It would employ about 20 people.

The state's first two ethanol plants began operating earlier this year, in Stanley and Monroe, while a handful are pro-



WSJ graphic

posed, including in Arlington and Dunn County.

"We believe that it's a good thing for the community. We hope that they agree. It's going to provide jobs, additional tax base and certainly increase commerce in our small town,"

Drachenberg said.

But Cambrians for Thoughtful Development, with a core group of 10 residents, questions Didion's commitment to the environment. In a news release, the group listed five times since 1993 that Didion was cited for violating environmental rules, including discharging a pollutant into a waterway without a permit.

Didion is disputing the latest citation, which alleges that it exceeded permitted storage capacities. If the company loses in this dispute, it might be subject to higher standards set by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

"We follow the regulations to the best of our ability," Drachenberg said. "I can't say we never made an error, but those errors have been corrected immediately."

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