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Catawba County is one of two counties in the country chosen for a \$30,000 grant from the National Association of Counties (NACo) and Motorola.

The funding will be used at the county's EcoComplex and Resource Recovery Facility to provide broadband capacity for real-time monitoring between the site and its partnered universities and businesses. "There's a lot of research that's going on, and there's a lot of data being developed," said Lee Worsely, assistant county manager, on Monday at the Catawba County Board of Commissioners meeting. This production of data left researchers needing a means to transport the data, which is how the grant will help the facility.

The EcoComplex, located on Rocky Ford Road in Newton, uses county waste to create methane gas. The facility uses wells and a vacuum system to extract the methane gas, which is then forced into an internal-combustion engine and used to create energy.

Barry Edwards, Catawba County Utilities and Engineering director, said the EcoComplex produces enough energy to power about 1,500 homes.

"It truly is an innovative system," said county commissioner Lynn Lail. "And we're very pleased that Catawba County seems to be ahead of the curve on this."

The grant is part of the Wireless Broadband Award Program, which provides counties with funding for equipment and services used to improve county operations. Humboldt County in California also received the grant.

The technology Catawba County will purchase with the funding will also provide wireless communication to improve the landfill's greenhouse gas emission monitoring and gas collection system.

The grant was announced in July at the NACo Technology Summit, and Worsely received news Monday that the county's application for the grant program was accepted.

"Counties are innovative," said NACo president Glen Whitley in a press release. "We use new technology and always search for ways to provide more efficiently."

Broadband technology isn't the only new aspect of the EcoComplex. County commissioners agreed Monday to terminate the facility's existing methane gas contract, which will save the county \$315,315. Contract termination and early buyout costs \$415,000, which will come from the solid waste enterprise fund. The fund contains solid waste tipping fees, and no ad valorem taxes are included.

The contracts with Catawba Landfill Gas, LLC and Newton Landfill Gas, LLC for methane gas extraction from the county's Blackburn and Newton landfills started in 1998. The partnership, at the time, was beneficial, Edwards said. The LLC qualified for energy tax credits and allowed the county to avoid spending \$2.5 million for infrastructure. The county used that money to purchase three General Electric Jenbacher engines for the EcoComplex.

The county will assume LLC's services, which include construction, operation and maintenance of landfill gas collection systems, following contract termination. The county previously paid LLC \$173,000 annually for these services.

Contract payments total \$730,315 for June to Oct. 2013, which is when the contract expires. By purchasing the remainder of the contract for \$415,000 at present value, the county saves \$315,315,

Edwards said.

The Board of Commissioners also approved the appropriation of \$100,000 for required compliance with new air quality regulations.

The county is required to submit compliance reports for its landfills annually. New standards for greenhouse gas monitoring include increased monitoring measures, data collection and methane monitoring surface sweeps.

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Catawba County, N.C.

O-N-E Staff Writer

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