

Rally, protest celebrate memory of Cesar Chavez

By John Saiz

Patterson Irrigator, Wednesday, April 7, 2006

Around 200 people made their voices heard Saturday at a rally and protest for environmental justice in honor of Cesar Chavez's birthday.

Participants marched from Garza Park in eastern Patterson to North Park on Plaza Circle around 11:30 a.m. Then, about 50 people protested at Covanta Energy plant on Fink Road, west of Crows Landing, around 2 p.m.

"I'm here to honor Cesar Chavez," said Paulina Flint de Castro of Greenaction, a San Francisco-based environmental advocacy group. "We're fighting for healthy living and working conditions. It's everyone's right to work and live in a safe environment."

Speakers addressed the crowd at North Park in both Spanish and English. Many said the Covanta incinerator, which burns trash and converts it to electricity, hurts the environment and the community's health.

"There's a plant here that's been polluting our community," said John Mataka of the Grayson Neighborhood Council, one of the groups that organized the event. "What we're here to say is, enough is enough." Covanta can take in as much as 800 tons of trash per day. In the past five years, it has violated emission standards twice. Officials with the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District, which monitors the emissions of local industries, have said that is good for a facility of its size.

"Modern waste-to-energy plants operating within the government regulations have not been shown to have any health risks," said Kent Burton, spokesman for Covanta.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a letter in 2003 that referred to such plants as having "less environmental impact than almost any other source of electricity."

Covanta officials said the plant releases dioxins in small amounts that are within federal, state and local guidelines. They note that diesel engines also produce dioxins. Demonstrators talked about dioxins released by Covanta as a serious health risk.

Bradley Angel, executive director of Greenaction, said dioxins are harmful at any level even if incinerators operate within state and local guidelines. Saturday's demonstrators included people from other areas that have shut down or prevented similar plants in their communities.

"They tried to put one in our neighborhood," said Harold Perez of San Leandro, as he stood in front of the Covanta sign leading to the plant. "If we didn't get together like this, they would have put one in our

"We've been tricked. We've been hoodwinked. We've been bamboozled that we have a friend in Covanta." -- John Mataka Grayson Neighborhood Council community. "It would have been a block away from our homes." Demonstrators said there are three incinerators in California, and all of them are in poor communities.

"All three incinerators are in communities like the West Side," Angel said. "It would not be tolerated in rich, white communities." Luis Molina, who serves on Patterson's planning commission and the Stanislaus County Office of Education board, said the day is a good beginning for activism in Patterson and proposed an alternative to incinerators.

"We're reacting to something, and that's OK," he said. "But we need to be active. We need to be activists. We should bring other alternatives like a recycling program so we don't have to burn those things."

Mataka said Cesar Chavez Day is a good opportunity to address environmental issues. "Cesar Chavez stood for more than farm laborer rights," Mataka said. "He recognized the connection between the environment and the farm workers' struggles."

The demonstration at Covanta lasted about one hour. Demonstrators briefly blocked the road leading to Covanta. Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department deputies who were on scene cleared them from the street without incident. Deputies did not arrest anyone or issue any citations relating to the demonstration.

"I think people need to wake up," Mataka said. "We've been tricked. We've been hoodwinked. We've been bamboozled that we have a friend in Covanta."

New fuel standards for trucks challenged

Environmental group sues, says rules will add to warming

By Bob Egelko, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, April 7, 2006

An environmental group challenged the Bush administration's new fuel economy standards for light trucks in federal court Thursday, saying the new requirements were not stringent enough and would only worsen global warming and the nation's oil addiction.

The Center for Biological Diversity asked the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco to review the legality of the rules announced last week by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for sport utility vehicles and other light trucks from 2008 through 2011. The standard now requires the vehicles to achieve 21.6 mpg and is scheduled to rise to 22.2 mpg for 2007 models; under the new criteria, the requirement in 2011 would be 24.1 mpg.

Both Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta and the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers described the new standards as tough and challenging for the auto industry. But the environmental group said the government is flouting a 1975 law that requires fuel economy standards to be set at the "maximum feasible level."

"The fuel efficiency increases are minuscule compared to what is possible with existing technology and the major reforms urgently needed to cut air pollution, combat global climate change and save money at the gas pump," said Peter Galvin, conservation director of the organization headquartered in Tucson.

A 38 mpg benchmark can be readily achieved by 2015, the organization said. It said the government, in its justification of the standards, had failed to mention the environmental impact of its decision to propose only a small increase in fuel economy.

Deborah Sivas, lawyer for the Center for Biological Diversity, said the government merely declared that its new standard would cause no environmental harm because it represents an increase in fuel efficiency over the current standard. She contended federal law requires the government to consider a reasonable range of alternatives, including technologically achievable miles-per-gallon requirements, and discuss the environmental consequences of choosing a lesser standard.

"We can't really have an informed public debate when that whole part of the discussion is truncated," Sivas said.

In comments submitted to the federal agency while it was considering the standards, the environmental group attacked the proposal on multiple grounds, including the lack of any discussion of its impact on global warming and the government's assumption that gasoline would cost between \$1.51 and \$1.58 per gallon from 2008 through 2011. As a result, the government seriously underestimated the benefits of greater fuel economy, the group said.

California's Attorney General Bill Lockyer has also attacked the new federal standards, in part because the Bush administration declared that California lacked authority to regulate motor vehicles' emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Lockyer, who is defending California's first-in-the-nation law on greenhouse gases in a suit by automakers, has not yet decided whether to challenge the federal rules in court, said spokesman Tom Dresslar.

Ehrlich Signs Stem Cell, Air Quality Legislation

By John Wagner and Ann E. Marimow, Staff Writers

Washington Post, Thursday, April 6, 2006; 5:24 PM

Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. today signed legislation intended to make Maryland a forerunner in stem cell research and to impose some of the nation's toughest air pollution standards for coal-fired power plants.

Ehrlich (R) had telegraphed his intentions on the stem cell bill, which will authorize \$15 million for the research in the coming year, but his decision to sign the environmental legislation caught even its sponsors by surprise. Both bills had been opposed by a majority of Republican lawmakers.

The bills were among 16 signed by Ehrlich today; he is expected to issue his first set of vetoes Friday, leaving time for the General Assembly to consider override votes before adjourning Monday.

With the both the stem cell and environmental bills, Ehrlich said lawmakers had "followed my lead" on passing legislation acceptable to the administration. But Democrats said it was Ehrlich who had co-opted their agenda.

The stem cell bill sets guidelines for awarding grants to conduct research using both embryonic and adult stem cells, research that supporters say holds great promise for treatment of a wide range of debilitating diseases.

In the wake of a 2001 executive order by President Bush that limited federal support for embryonic stem cell research, four states have agreed to provide money to support the science, which is controversial because it involves the destruction of a human embryo.

Much of Maryland's money, to be awarded by a state commission, is expected to flow to researchers at Johns Hopkins University and University of Maryland, as well as to companies in Maryland's biotech sector conducting research on adult stem cells. The adult cells, while not considered as promising for some treatments, are less controversial.

Ehrlich said the bill passed by lawmakers "is very close to the approach" he put forward at the start of the legislative session.

Susan O'Brien, executive director of Maryland Families for Stem Cell Research, a group formed last year, said her organization was pleased with the outcome.

"It's been a very long journey with these families who only want hope for the future," O'Brien said. "We wish it had been done in 2005, but we're happy the bill passed and we're happy the governor has signed it."

Several members of O'Brien's group attended the ceremony, including a 6-year-old girl with juvenile diabetes, who sat in the lap of Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. (D-Calvert) as Ehrlich and the legislature's two presiding officers signed the bill.

Under the Healthy Air Act, which Ehrlich signed with less fanfare, at least six of the state's oldest and dirtiest power plants will be forced to cut emissions that contribute to acid rain, asthma attacks, heart disease and other health problems. Maryland also will join a regional effort to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, which studies have linked to global warming.

"Now we'll have a little healthier air and a chance to spend less on public health problems," said Del. James W. Hubbard (D-Prince George's), one of the bill sponsors.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Friday, April 7, 2006](#)

Finally, South Modesto has chance to be heard

During the many years that Modesto Tallow Co. was making their lives miserable, the poor residents of south Modesto found it hard to get anyone to listen to their complaints.

There were several reasons, large among them the fact the residents had no collective voice and little political clout.

Other unincorporated areas, such as Hickman, Denair and Empire, communicate with government entities through Municipal Advisory Councils (MACs). These councils, whose members are elected by residents, meet monthly and advise the Board of Supervisors about their concerns. Their complaints, whether about sheriff's patrols or the condition of roads, tend to get heard.

Now, South Modesto might get such an advisory council, thanks largely to the initiative of Supervisor Jim DeMartini, whose large district includes that area.

As proposed, this new MAC would encompass three loosely defined neighborhoods: Bret Harte and Shackelford, named for their respective elementary schools, and Parklawn, a small neighborhood south of Hatch Road. Its name comes from an adjoining park.

Establishing a South Modesto MAC will be the subject of a public hearing May 16. Initially, the five council members probably would be appointed, but eventually they should be elected. That will encourage community participation and give credibility to the council's recommendations.

A MAC won't be a cure-all for South Modesto's many challenges, and inevitably there will be disagreements about its form and function. But this is a creative step to giving a voice and influence to an area that often has been ignored.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, April 7, 2006:](#)

EPA needs new name

Last week The Bee reported that, according to a team of nationally recognized scholars, the human cost of air pollution to the San Joaquin Valley is at least \$3 billion per year -- \$1,000 per person per year. Seems to be a "no-brainer." Let's clean it up.

In support of the study, Sen. Dean Florez responded that "we can't afford not to clean up the air" and Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez introduced legislation to limit green house gas emissions. While our elected officials seem to be rolling up their sleeves to do something about the dirty air we live in, at the federal Environmental Protection Agency it's business as usual. On April 4, The Bee reported that the EPA is proposing legislation to relax emissions standards for oil refineries, hazardous waste incinerators, chemical plants and other plants that discharge thousands of pounds of airborne toxins.

Looks to me like the Environmental Protection Agency forgot what it is supposed to be protecting. Maybe it should be called the PPA -- Polluters Protection Agency.

Philip Traynor, Fresno