

Tracy may see more money from plant

By Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Thursday, September 18, 2008

Tracy could get more money for fire protection and to fight pollution since the state last month extended a deadline for construction on a major power plant on condition that it rework an agreement with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The massive \$500 million East Altamont Energy Center has until August 2011 before workers break ground, since the California Energy Commission voted this August to give the company more time to market itself to future customers.

Construction on the 1,100-megawatt natural gas-powered plant was originally set to begin last month.

With the pushed-back timeline, Calpine Corp. — owner of the to-be-built power plant — needs to reexamine how well the planned East Altamont Energy Center meets today's air quality, soil and water standards, among other environmental concerns, the state energy commission said.

If or when it's built, it'll be one of three largest power plants in the state. Calpine will build the plant on a 44-acre swath of Alameda County land triangularly bordered by Kelso, Mountain House and Byron roads.

The state said the new agreement must guarantee more money to the public to pay for pollution-cutting measures — such as diesel engine replacement — and public safety, which for Tracy could mean a new fire truck and more money for the fire department.

That was under the agreement already in place. Energy commissioners say that now the valley and the Bay Area air districts need more.

Emissions regulations have changed and population surrounding the proposed site dramatically increased since the permit to build was first granted five years ago, the state pointed out.

Plus, it's just more expensive to keep the air clean these days, said Dave Warner who manages permitting for the valley air district.

"We have considerable more experience now with (diminishing) air impacts," Warner said. "We just know more about it (and) it costs more to get those (pollution) reductions."

The company has yet to contact the air district to renegotiate the decidedly outdated agreement.

Five years ago, the state made Calpine agree to pay the air district \$1 million in air pollution control measures once construction started.

But that was some time ago, the district argues, and the stipulations are outdated.

"As more than five years have passed without starting any construction, the (agreement) needs to be revisited," reads the letter from the district to the energy commission. "Since the project was first certified, the District has gained a better understanding of how to mitigate emissions from projects that impact the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin."

It's more costly these days to control nitrous oxide emissions, the air district stated, so the new agreement basically needs to get the company to cough up more money to the valley district.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District will also need to reevaluate the plant's effect, since it's permitted to emit into both air basins up to 263 tons a year of nitrous oxide and up to 148 tons a year of larger particulate pollution.

Under the original agreement, Tracy was set to receive \$250,000 after construction for a new fire engine and \$25,000 every year for the life of the plant for increased fire protection.

The rest of the money would go toward the district to pay to replace diesel engines with something less polluting on Central Valley busses, tractors or other farm equipment.

About \$600,000 of that amount was earmarked for Tracy.

Calpine asked for a few more years because it ran out of time before this summer's deadline to line up utility companies willing to buy the energy the plant plans to generate — enough to light up 1 million homes.

The state granted permission to build the Altamont Energy Center just after Calpine halted construction on 33 plants nationwide because of financial troubles — no doubt a major cause of the five-year delay, a company official said.

The company just this year pulled out of bankruptcy, which it filed for in 2005.

Calpine hopes now to land a contract with Pacific Gas & Electric Co., according to its petition to delay construction filed in May this year.

The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors has publicly opposed the plant since plans first came to public attention in 2002.

Lawmakers cede to Schwarzenegger budget demands

By Judy Lin - Associated Press Writer

In the Tri-Valley Herald and Modesto Bee, Friday, September 19, 2008

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—The longest budget impasse in state history could be close to being over.

California lawmakers were scheduled to vote Friday on a compromise budget deal that averted a historic veto by including Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's demands for fiscal reform.

The spending plan also scraps some of the borrowing gimmicks opposed by Schwarzenegger, who threatened to reject an agreement legislators approved just days earlier.

The state's four legislative leaders met with the governor again Thursday and agreed to many of his demands after conceding they were uncertain whether they could muster the two-thirds vote of the state Legislature required to override his veto,

They emerged from a mid-afternoon meeting saying they would change the \$143 billion spending plan the Legislature approved two days earlier.

The deal came 80 days into California's fiscal year, making it the longest budget stalemate in California history. Without a spending plan, the state has been forced to suspend billions of dollars in payments to schools, medical clinics, daycare centers and state vendors since July 1.

Schwarzenegger had criticized the earlier plan for failing to meet his demands for a more robust rainy day fund. He said the budget relied on accounting gimmicks to close a \$15.2 billion deficit—such as collecting an extra 10 percent of workers' income tax in advance and repaying it later—that could lead to an even larger deficit next year.

The four legislative leaders said they had agreed to remove that provision in their latest deal.

They planned to take up two bills. One would levy larger fines against businesses that underreport their tax liabilities, and another would ensure the state's rainy day fund could only be tapped when revenues fall below projected spending—the last remaining piece of the budget reforms Schwarzenegger sought.

The remainder of the budget approved Tuesday will stand, including \$7.1 billion in spending cuts that advocates say will trigger deep cuts to health care in the future.

It was unclear how soon Schwarzenegger could sign the new spending plan if lawmakers in both houses approve it Friday. However, the rainy day fund and a proposal to borrow \$10 billion against anticipated lottery revenues to help stabilize future budgets would require voter approval, likely in a special election early next year.

While the deal struck Thursday removes some accounting gimmicks, it leaves others intact.

It would require those who pay estimated taxes, including corporations and wealthier Californians, to pay a greater percentage of their annual taxes in the first two quarters of the year, a move that

would generate \$2.3 billion for this fiscal year. But the state would lower their tax payments in the last two quarters, artificially inflating state revenues.

New millionaires would have to pony up their taxes earlier and the state would borrow nearly \$1 billion from special funds intended for other uses, such as transportation projects and [reducing smog](#).

Lawmakers also are seeking to raise the fines on corporations that underreport the taxes they owe, to 20 percent from the current 10 percent. They said that would generate an estimated \$1.5 billion in the next fiscal year.

Schwarzenegger's once-anticipated veto would have marked the first time in modern history that a California governor vetoed an entire budget package.

Lung Association threatens to cut chapter ties

By Gene Johnson, Associated Press Writer

In the Tri-Valley Herald, Modesto Bee and other papers, Friday, September 19, 2008

SEATTLE — The American Lung Association has threatened to cut ties with its own Northwest chapter, giving it one month to rectify violations of the nonprofit's policies.

The American Lung Association of the Northwest has recently changed its mission statement, declined to run an anti-smoking program for teenagers and refused to commit to a campaign promoting influenza vaccinations - all in violation of its agreement with the national organization, said Carrie Martin, spokeswoman for the national group.

But most troubling to the national organization was the chapter's launch of a new nonprofit corporation this summer without approval from the national board.

"All of these things were indicators of their departure from the nationwide mission and programs, which is extremely disconcerting to us," Martin said.

Mike Alderson, who started in June as president and chief executive of the Northwest chapter, issued a statement saying he disagrees with the national organization's interpretation of the agreement.

"The ALA of the Northwest will address these allegations through the appropriate channels," he wrote. "The ALA of the Northwest will continue to help people in the states of Washington, Alaska and Idaho as we have for the past 102 years."

The American Lung Association of the Northwest has \$4 million in assets and an operating budget of \$8.1 million.

The national organization was founded in 1904 to fight tuberculosis, but now works to prevent all forms of lung disease, focusing on asthma, smoking and [air pollution](#). It has 14 affiliates around the country, and conducts direct-mail fundraising for those chapters. Money raised in each region stays in that region, with the national lung association keeping a slice for administrative costs.

The money raised must be used to support the mission of the American Lung Association.

But the Northwest affiliate changed its mission in August: Instead of "preventing lung disease and promoting lung health," it has focused on helping those who have lung disease and helping prevent future lung disease.

Because the national organization has a policy of not caring for patients directly, the chapter's new mission statement is inconsistent with the national organization, Martin said.

Martin said the national organization is committed to keeping a presence in the Northwest, and would have to decide how to do that if the regional affiliate doesn't change course.

Berkeley approves program to loan money to residents for solar systems Program is first of its kind and would help homeowners with cost

By Kristin Bender - Oakland Tribune

In the Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, September 18, 2008

BERKELEY — Kevin Gage, a sales manager for Borrego Solar, which has an office in Berkeley, said the company installs about 20 solar systems in the city each year.

But since the Berkeley City Council late Tuesday unanimously approved a first-of-its-kind program to help property owners with the cost of installation — by tacking the cost onto their property-tax bills over a 20-year period — that number could soon balloon.

A deal with a bank or private-investment firm to finance the project still needs to be worked out, but the new plan is a giant step forward in meeting the city's lofty goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050, city officials said.

"I really think that there is a huge advantage, especially in this current financial market," Gage said. "If a city, with their leverage and their security, can get this money, it seems like there is very little risk in that because they have the collateral of the whole home. If you were a lender, you'd be more secure in giving to a city than a single person. It's a great way of financing for renewable energy that benefits everybody."

The plan was crafted after more than 80 percent of voters in November 2006 approved Measure G, making Berkeley the first city in the nation to ask every man, woman and child who lives or works in Berkeley to do their part to reduce the city's carbon footprint.

With an 8-0 vote Tuesday night, the city approved the Sustainable Energy Financing District. This special tax district will enable property owners to install solar systems because Berkeley would pay all the upfront costs by borrowing a lump sum of money.

A pilot program will require about \$1.5 million to finance about 50 homes.

Each system is expected to cost about \$20,000 to \$22,000, with homeowners paying about \$182 monthly on their property tax bills. If all goes as planned, property owners could recoup some of the money from savings on their monthly energy bills, city officials said. Property owners will be charged interest, but the rates will likely be lower than what a bank would charge.

In a city staff report by Deputy City Manager Christine Daniel, it says there are about 4,000 homes in Berkeley that could benefit from having solar systems on their rooftops. There are roughly 25,000 residential and commercial properties in Berkeley, Daniel said.

But Gage thinks it could be more. "Anyone who has a roof facing southeast to due west would have a good roof for solar. If you have a lot of trees, that might be a factor, but there is increasingly more and more technology that can harvest more energy from sites that have shading from trees."

City leaders have had queries about the framework of the program from Hawaii to Massachusetts as well as from Europe and Asia.

Groups convene to address environmental concerns in East Oakland

By Kamika Dunlap, Oakland Tribune

In the Contra Costa Times, Friday, September 19, 2008

OAKLAND — Environmental activists and community groups will discuss at a meeting Monday the poor health conditions affecting many East Oakland residents living along the city's industrial corridors.

Groups will examine findings from a new report, "Cumulative Impacts in East Oakland: Findings from a Community-Based Mapping Study."

The report was put together by Communities for a Better Environment and other partners, including the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the California Air Resources Board, UC Berkeley and Bay Area Healthy 880 Communities.

The study addresses the environmental effects of toxic pollution, such as idling diesel trucks and pollution from auto-shop repairs and chemical companies.

"These things impact people of color and low-income communities a lot more," said Wafaa Aborashed, executive director of Bay Area Healthy Communities. "Their lives are at stake. This report is a great beginning to understand the high rates of childhood asthma and diabetes."

The report's highlights will be shared at a community meeting from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Tassafaronga Recreation Center, 975 85th Ave. There also will be performances by Oakland hip-hop artist Ise Lyfe, South African choir Vukani Mawethu and area poets.

Authors of the report say the goal was to outline the critical concerns of East Oakland residents and to offer solutions for helping to reduce diesel emissions that cause respiratory illnesses throughout the 880 corridor.

"The diesel traffic coming into some neighborhoods is so bad that people can't even sit on their front porch anymore because it's impacting their lives," Aborashed said.

In addition, the report is intended to urge the city to modify some of its planning and zoning codes to increase buffers between residential and industrial zones to protect public health.

The data for the report was gathered during the last year, where residents canvassed their neighborhoods and took inventory of businesses known to emit hazardous chemicals and places generating diesel truck traffic.

"We need to empower people to take control of their communities," Aborashed said.

Chicago outlines plan to slash greenhouse gases

By Caryn Rousseau, Associated Press Writer

In USA Today, SF Chronicle and other papers, Friday, September 19, 2008

CHICAGO—Mayor Richard M. Daley has announced a plan to dramatically slash emissions of heat-trapping gases, part of an effort to fight global warming and become one of the greenest cities in the nation.

The plan calls for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to three-fourths of 1990 levels by 2020 through more energy-efficient buildings, using clean and renewable energy sources, improving transportation and reducing industrial pollution.

"We can't solve the world's climate change problem in Chicago, but we can do our part," said Daley on Thursday. "We have a shared responsibility to protect our planet."

It's the first step toward cutting emissions to one-fifth of 1990 levels by 2050, as called for in the 1997 Kyoto global warming protocols, officials said.

Daley is one of about 800 mayors who have agreed to adopt that goal, and Chicago is the first to identify specific pollution sources and outline how it would achieve the reductions in a measurable way, said Suzanne Malec-McKenna, Chicago's environmental commissioner.

Malec-McKenna said the city would use a combination of incentives and mandates.

Next month, the City Council is expected to consider an ordinance that would update the city's energy code to require such things as better insulation, heating and cooling systems and windows in all commercial, industrial and residential buildings.

The city also has an agreement with two coal-fired power plants to reduce emissions or shut down by 2015 and 2017, respectively, Malec-McKenna said.

The plan also calls for expanding the number of green rooftops, increasing recycling and car-pooling and promoting alternative fuels.

Malec-McKenna said the city would not rule out imposing mandates on residents—though she said there are no immediate plans to charge motorists a fee to drive in congested areas, as New York had considered before the plan died last spring.

"We have 12 years to go on the plan, so we're trying now to have enough incentives," Malec-McKenna said.

Officials say Chicago emits 34.6 million metric tons of greenhouse gases each year; including the six surrounding counties, that climbs to 103 million metric tons per year.

If climate change is not addressed, summer heat indexes in Chicago could climb as high as 105 degrees—similar to Mobile, Ala.—by the end of the century and there would be more frequent heavy rains and floods, according to researchers from Texas Tech University in Lubbock and the University of Illinois who were commissioned by the city to study climate change.

Since 1980, Chicago's average temperature has risen approximately 2.6 degrees, 4 degrees in the winter.

"If you look at the records in Chicago, we have had the tendency to be moving toward milder weather conditions, the harsh winter seems to have decreased over time," said Jim Angel, climatologist with the Illinois State Water Survey at Champaign.

The city concedes that it won't be able to avoid future climate change entirely. The plan lists ways Chicago will deal with that, including implementing a heat warning system, reducing summer energy use, improving air quality, preparing for increases in rainfall and flooding, reducing erosion along Lake Michigan's shoreline and planting vegetation that can adapt to climate change.

Rebecca Stanfield, a senior energy advocate at the National Resources Defense Council in Chicago, said the report sets out a lot of work for the city.

"It's not like you can just walk away from this and say, 'We've got a plan to do this,'" Stanfield said. "It's a callback to everyone to the business sector, to the government sector to the advocacy community, that we've got a lot of work to do but at least we've got a road map."

On the Net:

Chicago Climate Action Plan: <http://www.chicagoclimateaction.org>

The great pall of China to return

By Calum MacLeod

USA TODAY, Friday, September 19, 2008

BEIJING — Wang Li is dreading this Sunday.

"The air will turn dirty again," he predicts. "For the last two months, the air quality has been better than I remember for 30 years, but that will change quickly," says Wang, 50, a printing firm manager in Beijing.

On Sunday, the city government will lift its pollution restrictions on cars and factories that have been in place since July 20 to create clearer skies and breathable air for the Olympic athletes. The success of these measures sparked a citywide debate about extending the restrictions and encouraged the government to take the unusual step of soliciting public opinion.

The Chinese capital's notorious smog was a major worry before the Summer Games, held Aug. 8-24. Four American cyclists created a ruckus when they arrived in Beijing wearing protective face masks. They apologized later.

Beijing's measures to clear the air delivered — big time. Air quality in August was the best in a decade, according to the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau. The cleaner skies continued into September for the Paralympics for disabled athletes, which ended Wednesday.

Surveys by the government-run Xinhua News Agency and several other Chinese news outlets show that a clear majority of respondents want to keep the law that restricts people to driving every other day, based on whether the license plate ends in an odd or even number. The environmental group Greenpeace commissioned a survey of more than 800 Beijing residents in early September.

"Close to 90% of respondents want to extend the measures beyond the Olympic period, even though it will create inconvenience," Greenpeace campaign director Lo Sze Ping says. "One-third

of respondents who drive said they would support automobile limitation measures. People are not only concerned about the environment but are willing to take personal actions."

Wang Wenjie is not among them. "I don't believe those surveys. None of the people I know who drive support a continuation of the odd/even day ban," Wang says.

He complains that his daily commute is twice as long — 2½ hours — on days he has to use public transportation instead of his car. "This restriction is stupid and troublesome. It's neither reasonable nor scientific. My car is my property. It's as if I bought a house and can only live in it every other day," Wang says.

Beijing's top adviser on the issue insists the ban was crucial. At least 1 million of the city's 3.3 million vehicles were off the road each day.

"There was a 40% reduction of all major pollutant levels during August, compared with June, which indicates that the controlling measures were very successful," says Zhu Tong, an environmental scientist at Peking University who drafted the city's blueprint for bluer skies. "In general, the traffic control is the most effective measure in the short term, but industry pollution control was also important."

More than 100 factories were shut during the two-month period, and most construction work was halted to reduce dust. Some factories have been permanently closed or relocated, notably the giant polluter Capital Iron & Steel Works, which is moving to reclaimed land off the Chinese coast.

The weather cooperated to help dispel air pollutants, Zhu says. "Unfortunately, the air quality will not be as good" after Sunday, he says, but it will still be better than it was in June.

This week, senior transportation official Zhou Zhengyu raised the possibility of new measures. "We are now in the process of studying this," Zhou said. "Please pay close attention — announcements will be made at an appropriate time."

Zhu Tong, who is analyzing data from the past two months, says, "We need to identify the measures that are the most effective and with least cost to society." He suggested that the government would consider a fuel tax and a congestion zone charge.

Greenpeace's Lo expects new measures "any time now" and notes that for the first time, the government is considering public opinion in developing an anti-pollution policy.

Some are doubtful. "I have no confidence in the government," says Wang Li, who has been driving for 20 years but favors the car restrictions. He says affluent residents will refuse to give up their cars.

"Many people have just bought a car to show, 'Look, I've got a car, I've got money.' They don't care about the environment," he says. "We will need at least 10 years to clear up the skies."

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses UC San Diego reports a surge in air pollution. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Universidad de San Diego reporta desglose de contaminación del aire

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, September 18, 2008

La Universidad Católica de San Diego presentó hoy un primer desglose de la contaminación del aire en esta región fronteriza.

El mayor deterioro, del 46 por ciento, es por el consumo vehicular de combustibles en el condado de San Diego. A esta le siguen las termoeléctricas, que producen el 25 por ciento de la contaminación.

El 25 por ciento prácticamente restante es residencial, de ganadería y agricultura, industria, basura y equipo de construcción entre otros.

La Universidad de San Diego espera que su análisis contribuya a un plan de desarrollo integral y ambientalista en el condado.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California finds excellent consequences by implementing environmental law.

Encuentra California excelentes consecuencias por implementar ley ambiental

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, September 19, 2008

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California informó que encontró excelentes consecuencias en un análisis sobre impacto de poner en vigor su ley ambientalista AB32.

La ley aumentará la economía en 27 mil millones de dólares, el producto interno estatal bruto en cuatro mil millones, y se traducirá en un ingreso *per cápita* de 200 dólares además de crear cien mil empleos.

En salud, previene 300 muertes prematuras anuales, unos nueve mil casos de asma y 53 mil días de trabajo que se perderían por enfermedad.