

Air regulators: Parents, students can help reach Valley pollution goal

By Alex Breitler, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Sunday, August 15, 2010

Walk your kid to school. Save San Joaquin Valley businesses \$29 million in pollution penalties.

Valley air-quality cops are asking parents and students to cut down on unnecessary driving in the early weeks of this school year, hoping that the Valley can meet a federal standard for harmful ozone pollution - a prime ingredient of smog.

Failing to do so would trigger a hefty penalty for businesses that emit pollution, even though most of the Valley's bad air comes from vehicle tailpipes.

"We are so close to meeting the standard and, with a little help from the public, we can get there," said Seyed Sadredin, head of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

In 1990, the Valley violated the one-hour ozone standard 50 times. But air quality in general has improved; last year, four violations were recorded. This year, so far, has seen zero violations, thanks in part to mild temperatures.

This year is the deadline for meeting the federal standard. Starting in 2011, a \$29 million penalty will be assessed on businesses each year if more than one violation takes place anywhere in the Valley, the district says.

Ozone levels often peak after school starts, district officials say. Cars line up outside of schools to pick kids up or drop them off. Most vehicles contain just one parent and one child.

So the district is asking parents to carpool or vanpool; walk their children to school; and avoid idling the car when waiting in line.

The next few weeks will be critical. Temperatures are expected to rise next week, and heat exacerbates ozone. Usually the air south of Stockton is the worst, but the plea from air district officials includes everyone in San Joaquin County.

Vehicles are responsible for 80 percent of the Valley's ozone. But the air district doesn't have the ability to regulate tailpipe emissions.

That won't stop them from asking for voluntary cooperation.

"The Valley has proven before that it can come together to make a positive change that benefits all of us," Sadredin said in a statement. "We need to do it now."

Walk to school — air officials ask parents to help cut ozone

By Mark Grossi

In the Sacramento Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Friday, Aug. 13, 2010

FRESNO — Hoping to head off a spike in lung-corroding ozone, air officials are asking parents to have their children walk, bicycle, take the bus or ride in a car pool as schools open throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

Reducing the annual surge in traffic not only would be healthier for the children, it might help the region's economy, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

If the valley avoids a violation of the federal one-hour ozone standard in the next seven weeks, the government would delay a \$29 million penalty for businesses from Stockton to Bakersfield.

The businesses are on the hook for the penalty in 2011 because the region has missed an ozone cleanup deadline, say air officials. But if there are no violations of the one-hour standard this summer — there haven't been any so far — the penalty would be delayed until 2012.

The one-hour standard focuses on short-term peaks in ozone, a summertime gas that forms when gases from such sources as vehicle emissions and dairies combine in the air.

"Call it a \$29 million incentive to leave your car at home," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "In the tough economic times we're having, it would be great if we could get through this summer without" exceeding that standard.

Air officials this year have been getting the message out about alternative transportation, on billboards, as part of their Healthy Air Living campaign.

But will it be more unhealthy for children to walk or ride bikes if the air turns smoggy next week? Sadredin said that if enough people opt for alternative modes of transportation, the air will be more healthy for children, including those who regularly walk to school.

"This is not a silver bullet," Sadredin said. "But it might be enough if we can just get parents to take a few other neighborhood children with them when they drive their student to school."

Cool and breezy weather earlier this summer helped slow the formation of ozone. The valley has only 48 violations of the more stringent eight-hour standard — an all-time low for this point in the season.

But the mid-August trend of ozone spikes — mostly because of back-to-school traffic — easily could spoil the clean season. The valley had its cleanest summer on record last year, but there were four one-hour violations. They took place in mid-August and September in Arvin and Edison, downwind of the Bakersfield metropolitan area.

Sudden increase in August

Over the past several years, statistics have shown that air quality in June, July and early August is better than in mid-August and September, said David Lighthall, science adviser for the district. A sudden increase in ozone concentration in August has been distinct, he said.

"The key factor is vehicular traffic in town when school starts up," Lighthall said.

Ironically, the one-hour standard was abolished in 2005 and replaced with the eight-hour standard. Yet the law requires the valley to eliminate violations of the old standard or businesses face a penalty.

Ozone can trigger asthma attacks and other lung problems.

The region's air — especially in the Fresno area and south — never has been clean enough to achieve state or federal ozone standards.

Most of the valley's ozone-making nitrogen oxides come from vehicles, but federal law requires payment of the penalties from businesses.

Officials earlier this year began discussing ways of helping businesses with the \$29 million penalty, including the idea of a \$10 increase in vehicle registration fees to cover most of the penalty.

The air district board would have to approve such an increase this year if there is a violation of the one-hour standard.

If the valley remains clean this year and avoids the penalty in 2011, the same scenario could develop next summer. The penalty again would be put off until 2012 if the valley has a second clean year in a row.

"If we had a third clean year in a row," said Sadredin, "the penalty would go away."

Judge orders trial in case over San Joaquin County chicken waste

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Stockton Record and other papers, Friday, Aug. 13, 2010

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- A federal judge says a lawsuit filed seeking penalties against one of the state's largest egg producing facilities over pollution from its manure lagoon should go to trial.

U.S. District Court Judge John Mendez in Sacramento rejected a motion to dismiss the case by Olivera Egg Farm. The egg farm, located outside of Stockton, has more than 700,000 chickens in cages at its facility.

The Humane Society of the United States filed the suit on behalf of the farm's neighbors, claiming the farm has been allowed to flout state and federal environmental laws governing air pollution.

The suit says the farm's 16.5-acre manure pond emits unhealthy levels of ammonia into the air, which burns residents' eyes and is a nuisance.

A lawyer for the farm, Jared Mueller, did not return a call seeking comment.

Global warming measure could suspend other landmark environmental rules

By Paul Rogers

In the Contra Costa Times, Monday, Aug. 16, 2010

A November ballot measure that would suspend California's landmark global-warming law could also end up rolling back some of the state's other sweeping environmental standards -- including rules that require utilities to generate a third of their electricity from renewable sources and programs requiring oil refineries to make cleaner-burning fuels.

How broadly courts might interpret Proposition 23 is setting off alarm bells among Silicon Valley executives and environmental groups.

"If we don't go forward with 33 percent renewable standard for California's energy supply, we undercut all those companies and entrepreneurs creating jobs in solar, wind, biofuels and other renewable forms of energy," said Carl Guardino, CEO of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, a San Jose organization that represents more than 300 companies and that opposes Proposition 23.

"We're saying let's take a U-turn to yesterday and be totally dependent on fossil fuels, rather than California leading the way to a renewable economy," Guardino said.

Last month, the nonpartisan state Legislative Analyst's Office issued an analysis of Proposition 23 in which it said that the 33 percent renewable electricity standard and the state's "low carbon fuel" regulations would be suspended if the measure passes. The Yes on 23 campaign says it agrees with that interpretation.

But environmental groups say considerably more could be suspended -- 60 state regulations,

including rules to reduce smog from ships, certain chemicals in air conditioners and even a 2002 state law that requires automakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 30 percent on new cars by 2016.

"Every measure to reduce greenhouse gases in California is at risk," said attorney Tom Adams, chairman of the California League of Conservation Voters. "All the regulations California has adopted for a clean energy future could be invalidated."

Supporters of Proposition 23, which so far has been largely funded by oil companies Tesoro and Valero, acknowledge the measure would suspend several state regulations. Most notably is the proposed "cap and trade" plan by the California Air Resources Board, which requires oil refineries, cement kilns, power plants and other large sources of greenhouse gases to limit their emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that the majority of the world's climate scientists say are warming the planet.

But the measure's supporters disagree with environmentalists on its breadth.

"Is Prop. 23 going to result in all these horrible things the other side is saying? The answer is no," said Anita Mangels, a spokeswoman for the Yes on 23 campaign.

The two main rules that would be suspended, Mangels agreed, are Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2009 executive order requiring Pacific Gas & Electric and other utilities to produce 33 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020, and the state's "low carbon fuels standard," an executive order Schwarzenegger signed in 2007 requiring oil companies to reduce the carbon content of their fuel 10 percent by 2020.

"Solar is one of the most heavily subsidized renewables at many levels," she added. "It is going to go on with or without Prop. 23."

How many of California's environmental rules could be blocked by Proposition 23 depends on how broadly its ballot language is read.

Simply put, the measure would suspend AB 32, a law Schwarzenegger signed in 2006, that requires California to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, a reduction of about 15 percent from current amounts.

The law would be suspended until unemployment falls below 5.5 percent for a year. It is now 12.3 percent.

To comply with AB 32, the state Air Resources Board has drafted a document known as the "scoping plan." It contains 69 measures -- some which are separate laws, some passed as administrative regulations, and some yet to be approved.

Billions of dollars could hinge on one part of Proposition 23. It says "no state agency shall propose, promulgate, or adopt any regulation implementing (AB 32) and any regulation adopted before the effective date of this measure shall be void and unenforceable until such time as suspension is lifted."

Environmentalists say that means potentially any one of the more than 60 rules and laws that the air board is counting on to meet the global warming target could be tossed out.

One, for example, is a rule the air board passed in 2007 requiring large ships to shut down their engines and plug into the electric grid at port. The goal was to reduce diesel soot in towns such as Long Beach and Oakland where it has been linked to high asthma rates. But the rule also would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and is counted by the air board toward the plan implementing AB 32.

So would it be suspended?

Mangels said no, because it was written under authority of smog laws, not AB 32.

Last month, the Legislative Analyst's Office weighed in. It said state regulations passed under the authority of AB 32 would be suspended, but separate laws would not. Rules that would be suspended include the 33 percent renewable electricity standard, but not a 20 percent renewable standard because it had been signed into law. Also not suspended would be the "Pavley Bill," a 2002 law reducing greenhouse emissions from autos, the Legislative Analyst's Office said.

The office didn't mention the ship rule or dozens of others in the AB 32 plan.

"We're going to see a lot of litigation," said attorney Alex Jackson, with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "It's going to get very messy."

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, Aug. 15, 2010:](#)

Independent thought not wanted at UCLA

By Lois Henry, Californian Columnist

I know you're going to wonder why you should care about some brainiac getting the boot at UCLA. So let me start by explaining why it matters, then we'll get to the nitty gritty of what happened.

It matters because it looks like UCLA is firing this guy because his work on air pollution doesn't fit with popular thinking and it wants to shut him up.

Popular thinking, that air pollution is killing us, is lucrative to universities by way of government-funded research grants.

The guy who's getting sacked, James Enstrom, was one of only a few scientists willing to stick his neck out and blow the whistle on an outright fraud and coverup at the California Air Resources Board (CARB) over regulations that will squeeze every wallet in this state once they're implemented.

Enstrom has been relentless, if not successful, in his efforts to get the air board to acknowledge that the science on the health effects of air pollution is not closed.

Moreover, he has demanded that the process of science-based regulation be honest, open and fair.

And that's why this really matters.

Out of step

Now, despite his 34 years as a researcher at UCLA, he's being dumped by a secret vote of the faculty in the Environmental Health Sciences Department.

Their official reason for not reappointing him is "your research is not aligned with the academic mission of the Department," according to a July 29 letter sent to Enstrom notifying him that his appeal of an earlier dismissal letter had been denied and his last day would be Aug. 30.

Department Chair Richard Jackson told me the faculty had no problem with scientific disagreement.

"They're not troubled by disagreement, but by poor quality science," he said, adding that "there are two sides to every story."

When I asked what about Enstrom's science had been subpar, Jackson said he would prefer I schedule a "formal interview" with him, which I did for the next day. He later canceled and referred me to Sarah Anderson, dean of communications for the School of Public Health.

Anderson e-mailed and asked what my questions were. I sent them and she replied that UCLA does not discuss personnel issues.

I objected that the faculty's opinion of Enstrom's published scientific work isn't a personnel issue.

I got nothing back.

Several other Environmental Sciences faculty members did not return my calls.

Beate Ritz, a leading air pollution scientist with UCLA who works in the Epidemiology Department, did respond.

She said she hadn't read Enstrom's 2005 study on air pollution.

But, based on his 2003 findings that second-hand cigarette smoke doesn't kill people, she said she knows him "for letting his interpretations go beyond the data and his personal biases to be strong enough to not allow for a balanced and appropriately cautious interpretation of the numbers."

Her attitude wasn't surprising to Enstrom, who said his 2003 paper, published in the British Medical Journal, was widely attacked.

"Not a single error was ever identified in that paper and I refuted all claims made against me and my research," he said. "My work isn't about being politically correct, it's about honest research and being faithful to the science."

Noted toxicologist Robert Phalen, who co-directs the Air Pollution Health Effects Laboratory at the University of California, Irvine, said Enstrom's science is very high quality. He theorized it has been Enstrom's outside activities, such as agitating at the air board, that did him in rather than his science.

"Jim was definitely out of step" with the direction of the leaders of his department, Phalen said.

Jackson himself alluded to that, saying the faculty were also troubled by Enstrom's presentation at a symposium in February put on by CARB to discuss the science examining air pollution's health effects. He didn't say exactly what about the presentation was upsetting.

Tangling with CARB

The Environmental Science mission statement says the department is "committed to furthering research and education at the interface between human health and the environment."

Enstrom has done exactly that with his studies, most notably one published in 2005 that shows no evidence of premature deaths in California due to exposure to PM2.5.

PM2.5 is tiny bits of dust and soot that CARB is trying to regulate to a gnat's hind end.

Specifically, CARB has regulations pending that would render today's trucking and heavy construction fleets inoperable in California.

The rationale for the regulations is that, based on numerous studies, PM2.5 kills thousands of Californians each year.

Enstrom's 2005 study was peer-reviewed and published in well-respected journals and, while some have disagreed with his conclusions, the study and its methodology have held up.

Yet, when a health effects report used to justify the new trucking regulations was written by CARB staffer Hien Tran, Enstrom's study was misquoted and discounted, as were others that don't support the notion that PM2.5 kills.

Tran, it was discovered by Enstrom and others, had lied about having a Ph.D in statistics from UC Davis.

Enstrom's bell clanging over Tran later revealed that CARB chairwoman Mary Nichols knew about Tran's falsification but kept mum to other board members until after they voted to approve the trucking rules.

As an aside, I'm still aghast that both Tran and Nichols have kept their jobs. Really, we can't find two people in the entire state who can do this job honorably?

Making friends

Back to Enstrom. He also single-handedly got scientist John Froines kicked off the Scientific Review Panel, a state organization tasked with identifying toxic contaminants.

And, as luck would have it, Froines is a voting faculty member of UCLA's Environmental Sciences Department.

It was the Scientific Review Panel that in the 1990s declared diesel exhaust is toxic. That declaration triggered CARB to gin up regulations to reduce the amount of diesel PM2.5 in the air, which is what brought on the truck and heavy equipment regulations we're now facing.

Scientists are supposed to apply for and be appointed to the Scientific Review Panel on three-year terms. Froines was appointed in 1984 and continued to sit on that panel for more than 25 years though he was only reappointed a couple of times in the early years.

It's not just an issue of needing new blood. The Scientific Review Panel verifies and approves methodologies for studies that are government-funded.

Froines is also head of the Southern California Particle Center, which conducts such government-funded studies. All of which makes his de facto lifetime appointment seem more than a little conflictive.

When Enstrom brought that to the attention of the Legislature, Froines was kicked off the panel.

I called Froines to see how he felt about that and his views on Enstrom but he didn't call back.

The offense of not going along

Enstrom told me he doesn't believe his colleagues have done bad science, per se, on air pollution.

His main concern has been with how one-sided and self-fulfilling the entire system has become.

CARB exists to regulate air pollution. It funds studies looking for ill effects of air pollution. Any effects found are used to justify more regulations and, hence, more studies.

Finding "no effects" doesn't fit into that cycle.

Then, of course, there's ego.

A scientist's work is considered more important if it points out a hazard rather than saying "everything's fine," Phalen said.

"Jim's work offends people because it diminishes the importance of their work," Phalen said.

Even accidental findings of "no effects" have been ignored.

In one major national study by Daniel Krewski, a map shows PM2.5 had little to no effect of premature deaths in California. And just recently Michael Jerrett revealed preliminary data from his CARB-funded California specific study that also showed little to no evidence of premature death from PM2.5 exposure.

That map has since disappeared from later uses of the Krewski study. And Jerrett has said perhaps mortality calculations should be changed.

"They've decided that no one else can have a say," Enstrom said. "Valid research is being stifled."

Enstrom had been in line to receive funding for a new study from the Health Effects Institute, but that likely won't happen after he loses his UCLA position.

All of this may seem like so much academic inside baseball. But these studies and how they're treated result in regulations that have real-life consequences.

Phalen noted that we are in a period in our culture where science is used to fuel movements rather than to elucidate. Going against the movement puts careers at risk.

Phalen himself is no stranger to swimming against the tide, having published a book in 2002 titled "The Particulate Air Pollution Controversy." He concluded that our hamfisted manner of setting environmental standards has created a regulatory environment that doesn't consider secondary consequences and may result in more harm than good.

Though Phalen couldn't say whether that book cost him his position on Froine's Southern California Particle Center, he wasn't reappointed after it was published.

So much for welcoming diversity of thought.

Opinions expressed in this column are those of Lois Henry, not The Bakersfield Californian.

[Merced Sun-Star, Guest Commentary, Monday, Aug. 16, 2010:](#)

Richie King: Please, approve Foster Farms expansion

The Livingston City Council will make a decision Tuesday that could create many local jobs within a week's time, and increase tax revenue and utility service revenue for the city -- leading to direct benefits for the community, businesses and schools.

Foster Farms' rendering plant expansion was deemed environmentally sound by multiple independent experts -- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Livingston's city staff, state Regional Water Quality Control Board, state Department of Fish and Game, Caltrans and the Livingston Planning Commission -- and will bring many long lasting benefits to our community.

Given the budget crisis and tough local economy, our families, the city and community deserve these benefits.

Let your Livingston City Council members know that you support this expansion.

The proposed expansion of Foster Farms' existing rendering facility by a modest 2,500 square feet meets critical needs for our community at a tough time and has the express approval of stringent environmental quality and permitting boards.

Seemingly, the choice is clear when a needed project for a local business is also a significant win for the city and local families. It is unclear why anyone would make a choice to prevent everyone from reaping these benefits.

This project will improve the rendering plant's operations, ultimately decreasing raw material transportation and recycling it locally for beneficial reuse.

Over the long run, the project will help reduce Foster Farms' carbon footprint and reduce pollution responsibly with a state-of-the-art vapor handling system, a negative pressure processing area and innovative technology to warrant a 100 percent negative declaration on environmental impact.

It will create new jobs, many immediately.

Construction jobs will be available within a week of the project's approval and the bidding process will be kept local to benefit Merced County employees and firms.

Construction will take approximately one year, during which time local businesses will benefit from increased patronage. Once complete, the facility will provide new entry level jobs as well.

The expansion will also create significant tax revenue for the city of Livingston by adding more than \$30,000 -- and more than \$80,000 annually to Merced County -- by way of property tax alone. (Foster Farms already contributes \$1.8 million in annual tax revenue.)

Add to that increased utility service fees and related income. Foster Farms has already paid the city more than \$200,000 in fees for the environmental consultant, permits, city engineers' and attorney's time, city time to review construction plans, administrative fees and other expenses.

Foster Farms will also pay substantial fees to the city for permits once the project is approved.

The city's own environmental consultant has scrutinized the environmental effects of the project and has found that the rendering plant expansion will not have a significant impact on the city in any way.

Findings concluded that the project met or exceeded all state and local requirements and that it would have no negative impact on the air, water, biological, geological, cultural resources or land.

Foster Farms has served and provided support for the city of Livingston for many decades.

I ask that you urge the City Council to vote to approve this expansion project.

Richie King is vice president of Foster Farms.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Sunday, August 15, 2010:](#)

Achieving 'green' through biomass

Within several weeks, the Modesto Irrigation District Board of Directors will make two decisions that will be key factors in whether a private company builds an \$80 million biomass plant on the east side of Modesto.

The plant would burn wood refuse from orchards, vineyards and elsewhere to produce electricity, which would then be sold to the MID.

If operated around the clock, it would generate 30 megawatts, providing up to 8 percent of the MID's total demand.

That amount would help the MID achieve the goal of obtaining 33 percent of its electricity from "green" sources by 2020. While the green mandate currently only applies to PG&E and other private utilities, all signs are that it soon will extend to the MID, the Turlock Irrigation District and other publicly owned utilities.

The company, a limited liability partnership called Valley Bio-Energy, hopes to start construction before the end of 2010 -- in order to qualify for federal economic stimulus money that would pay about 30 percent of the cost. The MID estimates it would start getting power from the plant in early 2013.

So while the plant has been under discussion for a year, the rush is on now to start building because of the deadline for federal dollars.

Valley Bio-Energy has received a tentative permit to build from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Stanislaus County supervisors do not need to approve the project, although the plant is in the appropriate land use zone.

Thus, the key public decisions fall to the MID board, which is being asked to:

Declare that the plant will not cause serious environmental impacts. The company's initial proposal, including the various environmental impacts and ways to mitigate them, went out for public review early in the summer. About 200 comments were received, and the MID staff is reviewing and responding to them. That follow-up report is due out this week.

The project needs a "negative declaration" in order to proceed. Initially we were concerned about the lack of a full environmental impact report, but this review is pretty thorough.

Sign an agreement to purchase up to 30 megawatts of electricity produced by the plant for 20 years. The MID would pay only for the power it gets.

Like most projects, this one has some pros, some cons and some unknowns.

Here's how we size them up:

Pros

The plant would produce a large amount of green power within the MID, enough to get the utility close to the green power goal.

It would not require the expensive and intrusive transmission lines that are required to import power from other states or parts of California. After the well-deserved criticism that it received last summer for its involvement with a massive transmission line from Lassen County, the MID is showing a strong preference for local projects.

Power from biomass would be more consistent than windmills and less expensive than solar.

The plant would employ about 22 people, with 15 to 20 others working for contractors providing the fuel.

Much of the material would come from nearby orchards and vineyards, those being either pruned or pulled out. The plant would not be allowed to burn garbage (municipal waste) without approval from the air district.

The plant is being proposed in an appropriate industrial area, where truck traffic is common.

The air pollution control district not only has provided a temporary permit, but its engineering experts appear enthused about the new technology, which could be used elsewhere.

And, the MID will not go further in debt by building this plant on its own. Its costs to connect the plant to the MID system would be about \$4.3 million.

Cons

Power from green sources costs more than those from coal- burning and natural-gas plants, often referred to as "brown sources." MID has refused to specify the price it is negotiating for the biomass power, as it did with the purchase agreement it signed for a solar farm north McHenry Avenue, but it would contribute to higher electrical bills. Staff now estimates the rate increase at 3 percent, starting when the biomass power becomes available.

The MID would be committing to a long-term contract at a set price, with a 2 percent annual escalator. If the demand causes the price of green power to soar, the MID will be in a good position. But if the market price of green power drops, the MID will be locked into the higher amount. It is impossible to predict just what will happen.

By committing to this purchase, the district would have less flexibility to purchase power when the market rates dip.

The MID is counting on this for a quarter of its green energy. If the project is a bust, it would have to look elsewhere.

Risks

The California Energy Commission could change its definition of green energy so that it no longer includes biomass. The proposed purchase power agreement includes a risk provision. For the first 10 years, the MID would bear the risk; for the second decade, the risk would fall to the company, with the MID able to renegotiate the power purchase agreement.

While this plant has clearance from the air district, there's another side -- greenhouse gas emission. The Center for Biological Diversity is strongly opposing biomass facilities -- individually and in general -- around the country on the grounds that they emit as much or more carbon dioxide than coal plants, therefore contributing to climate change. Currently, the federal Environmental Protection Agency considers biomass carbon neutral.

There are other risks, of course, but most of them seem to fall to the company that will build the plant. The power output is based on 24-7 production , which seems ambitious for new technology.

The company also is counting on an ample supply of wood refuse from orchards, vineyards and other sources in fairly close proximity. A different firm dropped its proposed hybrid solar-biomass plant in the southern San Joaquin Valley, in part because of concern that there would not be an adequate supply of burnable materials.

Bottom line

In evaluating the biomass proposal, we're going to set aside -- at least for now -- the huge incentives being offered by the federal government to promote renewable energy, even though they're a major factor in making the project pencil out for the partners.

At this point, we see the pros of the Valley Bio-Energy proposal clearly outweighing the cons. Looking at it from the perspective of the MID and its customers, it appears to be a relatively low-risk plan to obtain locally produced power generated from by-products of our agriculture industry.

That said, we encourage the MID to proceed with care and caution. Although the plan has drawn only minimal public interest so far, we urge the district to provide at least a full week -- and maybe another public workshop -- between the release of the updated review and the board's vote on the environmental declaration.