

Vote scheduled on using orchard wood as utility power

Bee Staff Reports

Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Monday, August 23, 2010

A proposal to turn orchard wood into electricity has been scheduled for an Aug. 31 vote by the Modesto Irrigation District board.

The district Friday released a 237-page document with responses to concerns raised about the project.

Most of the concerns dealt with whether the plant would improve air quality and have an adequate wood supply. In both cases, the authors said it would.

The 33-megawatt plant in the Beard Industrial Tract, south of Yosemite Boulevard, would provide 8 percent of the MID's power demand.

It is proposed by Stephen Endsley of Modesto, a real estate investor and retired cardiologist, and Robert Ellery, who owns a Hayward boiler company.

They would sell the power to the MID under a contract up for a board vote on the 31st. The price has not been disclosed.

The partners are counting on a federal economic stimulus grant to cover 30 percent of the \$80 million-plus cost of construction.

The plant would burn about 375,000 tons of chipped wood each year from Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties.

Most of it would be from nut and fruit orchards removed to make way for new plantings or development. The wood could include pruned limbs from living trees and waste from construction sites.

Supporters have said the plant would have unprecedented controls on its emissions, notably noxious oxides, which contribute to respiratory trouble.

Critics say this claim is unproved and that the operation would pollute via the diesel trucks that collect the fuel.

The project is intended to reduce the amount of orchard wood burned in the open.

Critics say most of this burning has been phased out, so the plant would not provide a net benefit. Supporters note that some open burning continues under exemptions to the phase-out.

Still time to comment on power plant

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, August 20, 2010

Valley air officials have extended a public comment period for the proposal Avenal power plant, responding to a complaint that the public notice was inadequate.

The period was scheduled to close this coming Tuesday. The new deadline is Sept. 13.

After already securing a permit from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the company working on the project is seeking a new permit that would call for a revised design that lowers the bar of emissions from the power plant. The district issued a preliminary determination of compliance in late July, triggering the public comment period.

Documents indicate the project, if built according to new plans, would be the cleanest natural gas power plant in the Valley, but some residents of Kettleman City and Avenal as well as activists aren't happy. They are opposing the project, saying that they are already overburdened by polluting industrial projects, including Waste Management's toxic landfill in Kettleman Hills.

An environmental justice group, Greenaction, was also complaining this week that the air district never notified the group, despite its long-standing concern about the project. Greenaction asked the district to extend the public review period.

Avenal Power Center LLC - a subsidiary of an Australian-owned investment bank, Macquarie Group Limited - wants to build a 600-megawatt natural gas-fired combined cycle power plant within the Avenal city limits, about six miles from the town's residential area. The project would generate enough electricity to power 450,000 homes and small businesses.

The project, however, is under close scrutiny by the community and activists because of its proximity to Kettleman City, where a rash of birth defects has caused much controversy and raised questions about the cumulative impact of industrial projects surrounding the area. Kettleman activists oppose the power plant project.

The project already has a permit from the California Energy Commission.

Meanwhile, another permit decision is pending from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, whose leadership has promised more efforts to prevent further impact on public health in the Kettleman City area.

Company officials have said they are hopeful they will be able to start construction early next year.

Community residents and activists have filed a civil rights complaint against the air district and the California Energy Commission. Bradley Angel, executive director of Greenaction, says he has been told by federal officials that the complaint has been accepted for investigation.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Friday, August 20, 2010:](#)

Professor shouldn't lose job over dissent, but aren't his foes supported by solid data?

I read with great interest Lois Henry's Aug. 15 column about the firing of California Air Resources Board critic James Enstrom, "Independent thought not wanted at UCLA," and I had several thoughts after reading it.

While I have to agree that both sides of scientific findings deserve the light of day and a fair appraisal of their merits, does anyone who lives in Bakersfield, or any community with high pollution/air quality issues believe that bad air isn't that bad for us?

I have lived through the 1950s and 1960s as a baby boomer kid and seldom knew kids with ear tubes, asthma, etc., at the increased numbers I notice today. Just because someone says, "Hey, I don't think that secondhand smoke kills," I remain dubious that they can say that with absolute certainty in the face of such overwhelming contrary information. At least not enough to want me continue to risk my life or my loved ones.

My father died, after surviving lung cancer treatment, because his lungs were so scarred from working in a steel mill where it was accepted practice to mix asbestos by hand in buckets. Now we find out that they knew in the 1930s and 1940s how bad asbestos was but "scientific data" showed there was no harm. Hmmm ... Too late now, huh? Mesothelioma, which takes 30 to 40 years to show up, is now much more common. Our family has to worry that the asbestos my dad brought home could now give us lung cancer in our 50s and 60s.

I'll guarantee that they had "good science" behind their findings when they continued to let asbestos into every school, hospital and public building tile back in the 1950s.

My thought is: Do we err on the side of our health and that of our children, grandchildren and future generations, or do we just hope that the minority view is right?

Just because this professor concludes through his own research that, "Not as many people are dying from air pollution" or "secondhand smoke doesn't kill" doesn't mean he's anymore right than those he opposes.

It is certainly not reassuring to me, nor does it make me want to expose myself or my loved ones to any more carcinogens, etc. than is necessary in this life. Secondhand smoke does aggravate lung conditions, children raised in this valley area show diminished lung capacity, so whose science is right here? Is there anyone out there (other than smokers) who wants to go back to smoke-filled restaurants, bars, grocery stores, etc.?

And while I agree, the professor should not lose his job because he disagrees with popular scientific beliefs, is the opposition not supported by solid data as well? He obviously had a long tenure at UCLA before he received his "boot." And, he was doing research for all those years that flew in the face of popular scientific belief. So to say now that they have no patience for opposition views seems a bit naive.

There may be more than we realize at play here. Was his goal by approaching the air board to tell them to let companies and all of us just keep on belching crap into the air, because it might not be as bad as some tell us? Gee whiz, let me be the first to tell him to take a hike.

We always seem to learn later that companies lie, lie, lie to make a buck. They'll pass along salmonella peanut butter to school cafeterias, cars whose gas tanks explode because it's cheaper to pay death benefits than correct the gas tanks. While I'm sorry the professor lost his job, I wonder why he spent so much time trying to show that bad air, cigarette smoke, etc. isn't quite as bad as other scientific data shows?

After all, this professor says, it ain't so bad! I'm breathing deeper already. Colleen McGraw is the proud mother of a disabled adult daughter, a retired social services employee and a budding Irish musician.