

Experts eye S.J. for green boom

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Thursday, June 9, 2011

STOCKTON - The Valley has the potential to attract solar, wind and biomass power plants - clean energy sources in a region where air quality fails to meet standards even after decades of improvement, experts said at the first State of Sustainability conference Wednesday.

The half-day conference, organized by the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce, summarized sustainability efforts to date in the areas of renewable energy, air quality and recycling. The meeting was an offshoot of the chamber's Green Team San Joaquin, which seeks a melding of environmental stewardship and the bottom line for businesses.

Carla Peterman, appointed by Gov. Jerry Brown to the California Energy Commission in January, told the group that 2,000 megawatts of alternative energy projects were issued permits last year in the Central Valley. If all of those projects were built, that would provide enough power to light up as many as 2 million homes.

And with 2011 not quite half done, an additional 10,000 megawatts worth of projects are under review, Peterman said.

"We've been heavily reliant on natural gas and petroleum – this must change," she said.

Air pollution generated by San Joaquin Valley businesses has dropped 80 percent since 1980, said Seyed Sadredin, chief of the Valley Air Pollution Control District. But that improvement hasn't been cheap, he said; businesses bore the brunt of new rules and regulations requiring them to change their operations.

Even now, the Valley is not in compliance with existing ozone standards, requiring at least an additional 80 percent in reductions. And an even stricter standard may be proposed this summer, Sadredin said.

"I'm not here with a 'Mission Accomplished' sign, unfortunately," he said.

The district lacks authority to regulate tailpipes from heavy-duty trucks, which is the biggest piece of the pollution pie. The good news, Sadredin said, is that the district has \$220 million this year in local, state and federal funds that it can give away for energy efficiency projects, cleaner school buses and lawn mowers and mass transit projects.

As for recycling, California as a whole has increased diversion rates from about 10 percent in 1989 to just less than 60 percent today, said Rosalie Mulé, director of government affairs for Waste Management. Recycling businesses employ 85,000 people and generate \$4 billion a year in wages and salaries.

No longer do people think of recycling as "an environmental thing all the Birkenstock people do," she said.

Tulare County Planning Commission delays vote on Pixley biofuel plant

By David Castellon

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, June 9, 2010

The Tulare County Planning Commission has delayed a vote to permit a new plant north of Pixley that would convert cow manure into energy.

That decision came after Pixley area residents and representatives from California Dairies Inc., which operates a milk plant north of the proposed facility, complained the spread of odors, dust and bacteria hadn't been properly addressed.

Some complained Calgren Renewable Fuels — which operates a Pixley ethanol plant and wants to build the methane-extraction facility — hasn't given Pixley residents sufficient notification about the project.

"It would have been nice if we were on the starting blocks for this," Betty Morehead, a 35-year resident of Pixley, told the seven commissioners during their meeting Wednesday at the Tulare County supervisors chambers in Visalia.

Calgren plans to build the \$10 million biogas facility on 2.75 acres south of Avenue 120, just west of Highway 99. Key to the facility would be an anaerobic digestion tank in which microorganisms break down manure, generating methane gas.

That gas would be pumped through underground pipes to a Calgren plant to the south, where the methane would be burned to heat a boiler used in making ethanol, a grain alcohol made primarily from corn that can be used in gasoline.

Lyle Schlyer, Calgren's president, said using methane would reduce the ethanol plant's dependence on natural gas by 10-12 percent. Officials said methane produced daily through manure extraction would generate power equal to that produced by 2,400 gallons of gasoline — enough to fill the tanks of about 150 sedans.

Also, supporters said the project would create a new use for manure produced by cows on two or three local dairies and ease their burdens to dispose waste safely.

Excess heat from ethanol production would be used to heat the digestion tank, Schlyer said. What's left after methane is produced — a peat-like substance from undigested grasses and grains — would be free of bacteria and could be sold to nurseries or to dairies for cow bedding.

"We really believe digestion projects are important," said Frank Junio, co-owner of Four J Farms, which operates a dairy near Pixley that would have its manure mixed with water and pumped through pipes to the biogas facility.

Pixley residents who addressed the Planning Commission worried the facility would generate odors drifting into town.

Morehead noted that while there are many dairies in the area, operators only haul manure to fertilize crops a couple of times a year, so residents only have to put up with intense smells at those times.

The biogas facility would have 10-12 dump truck deliveries of manure a day.

Also, bits of manure could fall off uncovered trucks and some storage pits holding untreated manure would sit uncovered in pits, residents said. Morehead said she didn't believe enough research has been provided to show the extent of the odors that might be generated or if bacteria from manure could spread onto nearby crops.

"If we have a salmonella outbreak because of mismanagement of manure, we're all in trouble," she said.

Louise Rambo of the Pixley Town Council said she didn't hear about the plant proposal until Friday, when someone asked why the council hadn't weighed in on the issue.

"I didn't have the slightest indication this was planned for Pixley. Everyone was shocked a manure digester was being planned," Rambo said.

California Dairies' representatives told commissioners the biogas facility could threaten their \$250 million processing plant to the north if odors, dust or bacteria from the manure get through air filters and infuse with butter or powdered milk produced there.

Opponents said they aren't opposed to manure digestion plants and even lauded Calgren for exploring a renewable energy option. They just think it should happen someplace else.

Schlyer responded by saying they were missing the point: "Digestion cleans up the air.

"We're surprised at their stance, considering we're in dairy country," he said. "It's a marriage of our industrial and dairy needs."

A report commissioned by the county and paid for by Calgren concluded the biogas plant would have no significant negative effects on the environment if the company follows the county's recommendations. As such, county planners recommended approving the special use permit if those conditions are met.

There are nine biogas facilities in California, one operating on a dairy east of Tulare, though it's of a different design than the one proposed for Pixley.

Another anaerobic digester has been proposed to be built on the Moonlight Dairy on Avenue 280 just east of Visalia. The methane produced would be used to generate electricity, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which received a grant application for the project.

Schlyer tried to convince planning commissioners to vote during Wednesday's meeting on the Pixley biogas special use permit. He said the debate could end up being moot if the California Energy Commission rescinds its offer to provide a \$4.6 million grant.

Schlyer said the Energy Commission originally gave Calgren a late May deadline to get approval from the county because the state agency had a late June deadline to finalize its own approval.

Schlyer said Wednesday he didn't know if the Energy Commission would wait for the Planning Commission vote to during its next meeting, June 22.

Without the grant, Calgren would drop the project.

Air regulators to announce rail yard study

By Associated Press

In the Hanford Sentinel and S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, June 9, 2011

San Bernardino, Calif. (AP) -- Air quality regulators are expected to announce a major pollution study at the San Bernardino Rail Yard, a major gateway to the nation's trade system.

The two-year study, to be announced at a press conference on Thursday, will be funded by the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

The study was prompted by a 2008 report by the California Air Resources Board that found this rail yard topped the state in terms of health risks to the surrounding community because of the large number of people living nearby.

The study will include reporting on environmental health risks and well as surveys of respiratory diseases and the health issues among children and adults. Researchers hope to determine if there is a higher fatal cancer rate in the surrounding community.

Air-quality regulators to study health effects of San Bernardino Rail Yard **The in-depth examination will try to determine whether the inland shipping hub has caused an increase in cancer and asthma in nearby low-income communities.**

by Phil Willon, staff writer

in the L.A. Times, Thursday, June 9, 2011

Southern California air-quality regulators are sponsoring an in-depth study to determine if the San Bernardino Rail Yard, a major inland hub of goods shipped across the U.S., has caused an increase in cancer and asthma in the neighboring low-income communities.

The study comes two years after the California Air Resources Board determined that diesel emissions from locomotives, big-rigs and other equipment at the facility posed a significant health risk to thousands of residents living near the site, and that the facility posed the greatest cancer risk of any rail yard in California.

"The is an opportunity to finally gauge the nature and extent of the problem," said San Bernardino Mayor Patrick Morris.

The San Bernardino Rail Yard is a 168-acre Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway facility operating around-the-clock in the heart of San Bernardino, a critical transfer hub for big-rigs and freight trains hauling cargo.

A federal appeals court last year struck down an effort by the South Coast Air Quality Management

District, which is sponsoring the new study, to limit emissions from the locomotives. The court ruled that the agency overstepped its authority, and that only the federal government can regulate interstate commerce.

The new two-year study will be conducted by researchers at Loma Linda University, and will determine the number of new and fatal cancer cases in the area from 1999 to 2008. It will include a household and school-based survey to determine the prevalence of respiratory and cardiovascular disease. Researchers also will be taking air samples inside homes to gauge the amount of airborne particulates.

Sam Soret, chairman of the environmental and occupational health studies program at Loma Linda, said the team will go home to home, checking the lung capacity and respiratory inflammation of adult residents, and also examine children at an elementary school near the rail yard. The study also may incorporate data from an ongoing UCLA study on air quality around rail yards in San Bernardino, Commerce and Long Beach.

As part of the study, Loma Linda also will provide medical treatment to residents affected by the emissions.

Sylvia Betancourt, of the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice, an environmental advocacy organization in Riverside, said she hopes the study's findings will persuade federal and state regulators to crack down on toxic air pollution coming from rail facilities. She said there has been little willingness by rail companies to address the health concerns.

"We expect that we'll be able to document what people already have been suspecting, that it's a health risk to the community," Betancourt said. "The rail industry can change the way that they operate. They can move to a technology that's zero emissions, but they refuse to."

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway spokeswoman Lena Kent said the company has been committed to reducing emissions at the San Bernardino rail yard. The company has installed automatic gates to decrease idling by incoming big rigs, and purchased low emission rail equipment used to move containers and rail cars. The company also agreed to make its fleet of locomotives in California the cleanest, on average, in the state.

"Basically, we have spent hundreds of millions of dollars, not only in San Bernardino but across California to reduce emissions," Kent said.

She said the company has resisted calls by environmentalists to convert the rail yard to an all-electric facility, similar to a Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway proposal for a new facility near the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, because the San Bernardino yard would have to be shut down for months.

