

Federal environment officials take Western policy talks to resort

JOHN HEILPRIN, Associated Press Writer
in the S.F. Chronicle, Wed., Jan. 5, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Bush administration environmental officials and senior members of Congress are to speak to business leaders at an Arizona resort this week in what is being billed as a chance for executives to determine strategy over wine, meals and golf.

Sponsors call it a venue for increasing Western participation in federal energy and environmental policies. Frank O'Donnell, head of the environmental group Clean Air Watch, calls the gathering a forum for "polluter lobbyists to buy access to top federal and state officials."

Interior Secretary Gale Norton is to be the keynote speaker at a dinner Thursday night sponsored by one of the world's largest gold mining companies, Placer Dome Inc. of Vancouver, Canada.

Dan DuBray, an Interior Department spokesman, said the access that business people will gain to Norton is proper since "it is not uncommon for these business sectors to be linked to the issues that the Department of the Interior handles on a regular basis."

The conference -- sponsored by the Golden, Colo.-based Western Business Roundtable and BIPAC, a political action committee -- is Wednesday through Friday at the Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa in Phoenix.

The Western Business Roundtable, whose members are chiefly energy companies, is nonpartisan and has held similar conferences featuring federal officials, including members of the Clinton administration.

"We push for laws that promote a commonsense balance between economic growth and environmental conservation. That is our mantra," said Jim Sims, the business roundtable's executive director, who served in the White House in 2001 as the communications director for Vice President Dick Cheney's energy task force.

"Any group that opposes that commonsense approach is, by definition, an extremist group, from the West's perspective," he said in an interview Tuesday. "We make no apologies for promoting the interests of the West's economy."

The meeting also includes a charity golf tournament to benefit the group, "Engineers Without Borders," and a "Wild West Saloon Night" to benefit the Colorado School of Mines.

Other speakers at the retreat include Reps. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., and Joe Barton, R-Texas, respectively chairmen of the House Resources Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Idaho Republican Sens. Larry Craig and Mike Crapo and former Rep. Charlie Stenholm, a longtime Texas Democrat unseated in the November election, also will speak to the group.

Both James Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and a senior Environmental Protection Agency official are scheduled to take part by videoconference in a talk about federal air pollution regulation.

Cleaner Diesel for Tulare County

Valley Voice Newspaper, January 4, 2005

Tulare County - Tulare County is looking to switch its 220 heavy work vehicles to a cleaner diesel fuel that could cut PM10 emissions by 20 to 46% and smoke by 70%.

Sooty diesel fuel is one of the biggest problems in the central valley categorized by the Air Resource Board as the number one toxic contaminate in the state.

Mandates to clean up diesel emissions have hit farmers and truckers hard requiring them to make big capital investment to buy cleaner engines or switch altogether from diesel technology. Recently power utilities offered price concessions to valley farmers to switch their stationary engines to electricity to help clean the air but forces them to pile up debt doing it.

While it may take many years to convert over a million diesel vehicles, 16,000 stationary engines and 50,000 portable engines in the state - all those engines could run lots cleaner by burning alternative diesel fuel tomorrow.

Cash strapped Tulare County can't afford to convert its fleet of dump trucks, flat beds or earthmovers. But it can afford a new tank at its work yard full of cleaner burning diesel fuel.

Right now the fuel is about 11 cents a gallon more than standard number 2 diesel, says fleet manager Dan Hurt, who says he is just beginning using a new ethanol added diesel fuel - O2 Diesel on 12 vehicles stationed at the yard on Lovers Lane.

If things work out, the yard will adopt the new fuel supplied by Silva Oil of Fresno for all its diesel vehicles after this test period. "So far so good," says Hurt.

Silva Oil representative Richard Bias says his firm supplies O2 diesel to other jurisdictions, like Fresno County, and private firms like PG&E and FedEx who are trying the fuel out as well. Bias says his company is also selling a biodiesel blend 20% with regular diesel in a fuel called B-20. This fuel, too, cuts harmful emissions including a 30% cut in hydrocarbons and a 22% reduction in PM, he says. With an additional additive B-20 also reduces emissions of Nox from standard diesel.

The latest with biodiesels is a new federal law that lowers the cost of biodiesel to customers, the same price as standard diesel after January 1, 2005, says Bias.

These are just two fuels the California Air Resource Board is currently testing to verify its use as an alternative diesel fuel that can be used as a strategy to meet the state's pollution mitigation program. The state offers various fuel incentives if you are verified.

Another fuel with high marks that can help cut emissions ultra-low diesel (11 ppm sulfur) with an added particulate filter that can cut PM by 80%. This is the type of emission control equipment that will be required to be placed on vehicles beginning in 2006.

Tulare County's largest fleet of passenger vehicles, 850 strong, is also being cleaned up, says passenger fleet manager Mark Christian. The county is trying to convert its standard gasoline fleet into hybrid at a rapid pace with 15 Toyota purchases and 36 Honda hybrids so far with about 12 expected in this new year. Christian says obtaining the vehicles has been a challenge because of their popularity.

Another alternative at the county is to replace older diesel vehicles with CNG vehicles says the county's James Blair assistant director of transportation. CNG is the technology that has been adopted by the city of Visalia and the school district as the way to meet air quality regulations with two new CNG fueling stations going into Visalia soon. Dinuba, too, has adopted CNG technology as a cleaner alternative than diesel and is dedicating a fueling station in the next few weeks. Blair says the county is applying for \$2.7 million in air quality grants to help replace county vehicles.

Blair says while it is the practice to move to clean up the county's overall fleet, there is no actual board policy. He expects that to change soon with a policy being presented to the Board of Supervisors.

Lemon Cove farmer Jim Little says he uses biodiesel delivered from Silva Oil on his farm to heat the house, fuel the tractors and power two Mercedes cars. "I started using it nine months ago and I wouldn't use anything else," says Little. He says the renewable fuel cleans his engines and "you can put your nose right down on the tailpipe and there is no exhaust." Biodiesel is made typically from soybean oil or cooking oil. Little says her recommends the fuel to his farmer friends.

Plant gets OK to burn old tires permanently

By STEPHANIE TAVARES, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2005

A Lebec-area cement plant has gotten the go-ahead to permanently burn tires as a fuel source, despite heavy opposition from area residents.

National Cement Co.'s factory, located east of Lebec in southern Kern County, received permission Dec. 8 to permanently substitute up to 25 percent of its fuel source with chipped-up old tires.

The company has been burning tires under a temporary experimental permit on and off for about two years, mostly without the knowledge of area residents who fought the project in its final stages.

District staff and the Kern County Air Pollution Control District Board had recommended the state allow the plant to permanently use old tires as fuel in November.

The California Air Resources Board and the state office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessments both approved the environmental impact report for the project in December, allowing district staff to issue the company an official authority to construct permit for the project.

"I feared this after the air board approved it unofficially," Lebec-area resident Linda MacKay said of the recent issue of the permit. "We are very disappointed, but not surprised. I feel like quite often our (government) representatives put industry in front of the health and safety of the people. It seems like money talks."

The permit is basically a rubber stamp, as the infrastructure for burning the tires has been in place for about two years, when the district issued the plant's first temporary experimental permit to burn tires.

National Cement is currently operating under a second temporary experimental permit that allows the plant to substitute up to 50 percent of its fuel with old tires.

The company hopes to someday substitute the cheap tires for half of its fuel, although it has currently only used tires as about 32 percent of its fuel, district air pollution control officer Tom Paxson said.

The plant's closest neighbors, though, are not happy with the decision to allow National Cement to burn tires, a process that emits a higher level of the toxic chemical cocktail dioxin.

The company has a less-than-perfect environmental record and locals are concerned the company will pollute their air in even more dangerous ways than before.

National Cement has been cited for at least 63 air pollution violations since the plant opened in 1966 and has had at least 43 violations in the past four years.

"I'm leery of them, given their record and I'm also leery of our government agencies that gave them all these citations, but continue to allow them to run in that way," MacKay said. "I don't have any faith in either entity for being accountable for protecting the health of the folks in the area."

National Cement President Don Unmacht was not available for comment, but has told *The Californian* in the past that the violations were because of stricter emissions standards applied to the company after a new, more fuel-efficient kiln was installed in 1997.

Unmacht told *The Californian* in November that the plant's record would improve with time and experience.

Modern dairies better, safer than in past

By ROBERT C. HARGREAVES, Bakersfield

Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2005

The dairy issues raised by Arthur D. Unger of the Sierra Club deserve response. Even under the Williamson Act dairies are assessed at much higher evaluations than other agricultural properties and pay much higher property taxes. Like all taxpayers they are entitled to county services.

Actually, dairies require far fewer county services than housing developments do in the way of schools, road maintenance, sewers, police and fire protection.

Perhaps the problem to developers is that dairies are the only agricultural enterprise economically strong enough to withstand development pressures. Chino dairies are hanging on much longer than many would like.

The charge that dairies are moving close to developing areas to cash in on rising real estate values 30 years to 50 years down the road is absurd.

There are much easier and quicker ways to speculate in real estate. The majority of dairies that have left Chino have moved out of state to places like Arizona and Utah where the chance of real estate appreciation is minimal and pressure from groups like the Sierra Club is also minimal.

Clay-lined lagoons have been required by state law for more than 30 years for all new dairies. The primary purpose of these lagoons is to prevent manure runoff. Recently the law has been extended to include existing dairies and the lagoons must be large enough to hold the water from the wettest winter in 100 years.

Most California soil types combine with cow manure to produce an impermeable barrier. The problem with older dairies is not leaching but lack of penetration. Winter rains can stand for months, creating ideal conditions for the production of methane and ammonia. Today's dairies resolve this by sloping the pens and installing drains and pumps.

While no one disputes that methane generators can prevent methane and ammonia from entering the environment, this is only one of many solutions to the problem. The simplest is the regular removal of manure and lagoon slurry to place on crops. The crops then utilize the manure to make proteins and other substances before methane and ammonia can be formed. Fresh cow manure has negligible amounts of methane and ammonia. These products are slowly made by microbial action over many months.

Current dairy management practices that minimize methane and ammonia production also reduce odors and make it difficult for flies to reproduce. Today's dairies have few flies even though pesticide use has been greatly reduced or even stopped altogether. The only pesticides approved for use on dairies are also approved for general household use. What is in that can of bug spray you use in the house?

As with any industry there are always bad examples, but in general today's dairies are better managed, far cleaner and more environmentally sensitive than those of yesteryear.

Rather than look at the past in Chino we should be looking to the future in Tulare. Tulare has imposed strict dairy controls through the permit process for more than 30 years and has worked closely with University of California, Davis scientists in keeping abreast of new environmental developments. People in Tulare are well worth listening to.

Robert C. Hargreaves of Bakersfield is a retired state veterinarian. Community Voices is an expanded commentary that may contain up to 500 words. The Californian reserves the right to reprint commentaries in all formats, including on its Web page.