

S.J. air officials ask public to police self

Agency says Valley is cleaner than it was just a few years ago

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Wednesday, Aug. 5, 2009

STOCKTON - When San Joaquin Valley air quality cops outlaw wood burning on cold winter mornings, some people grumble.

The region's many rules and regulations - some of which are unpopular - have always been the most effective weapon against bad air, and, indeed, experts say the Valley is cleaner than it was just a few years ago.

This summer, however, those officials are taking a different tack: They're asking for your help.

"We have a great number of rules, but we are getting near the point where people really need to step up and do things voluntarily," San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokesman Anthony Presto said.

Enter the Healthy Air Living program, the subject of a small, intimate gathering in north Stockton on Tuesday night. It was one in a series of informal air pollution "chats" held up and down the Valley.

Businesses such as factories and power plants have borne most of the rules imposed, and their emissions have decreased 80 percent since 1980.

Now it's time to reach for higher-hanging fruit, officials said, and that involves changing human behavior. For example, they gave away insulated lunch bags at Tuesday's event, hoping people will bring meals to work instead of driving to restaurants.

"This is to get people to think about every single day how they affect air quality and the kinds of changes they can make," Presto said.

Poor air quality costs the Valley an estimated \$5.6 billion a year and causes hundreds of premature deaths, studies have shown. And yet fewer than a dozen people showed up for Tuesday's chat, and of those who did, most admitted that while they think about air quality, they don't let it change their actions. That changed for at least one person.

"It's helpful to know about other behaviors," said Stockton's Shani Adams, who attended with her 9-year-old daughter, Soyini. "Knowing about electric lawn mowers, knowing to take your lunch to work, that kind of education, I think, is going to change things for me."

The small group made for pretty swell odds on winning a cordless electric lawn mower, retail value \$500. That prize went to Manuel Maduena, a Stockton resident since 1955.

The 83-year-old said: "It's the first time I ever won anything."

To learn more

For more information about voluntary strategies to reduce Valley air pollution, visit www.healthyairliving.com.

Those who pledge to adopt clean-air behaviors this summer will be eligible to win a hybrid automobile. Information: (209) 557-6400.

Tire fire burns near Buttonwillow

Taft Midway Driller, Wed., Aug. 5, 2009

Taft, Calif. – Fire consumed most of a huge pile of tires early Tuesday near Buttonwillow.

Kern County firefighters received a call of a possible structure fire near Seventh Standard Road and I-5 at 3:39 a.m.

When they arrived, they found a large pile of tires – about the size of a football field – that was about 20 percent involved.

The nearest water source was three miles away, so there was little firefighters could do except call in a bulldozer to push unburned tires away from the burning tires. Most of the fire burned itself out.

The cause of the fire is suspicious and is being investigated.

The Kern County Department of Environmental Health and San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District were also called to the scene.

Energy commission looks at TID's new power plant plans

By Alex Cantatore, Civic Desk

Turlock Journal, Wednesday, Aug. 5, 2009

The Turlock Irrigation District began the long regulatory path towards improving Turlock's electrical system on July 30 when the California Energy Commission conducted an informational hearing on the Almond 2 Power Plant Project and a bus tour of the proposed site.

If approved, the 174-megawatt clean natural gas fired, simple-cycle peaking electricity generating Almond 2 Power Plant would provide additional protection against power outages for TID customers.

"This generating facility is very important to us to meet our generation and reliability needs for our consumers," said TID General Manager Larry Weis.

Sited on 4.6 acres adjacent to the existing 48 megawatt Almond 1 Power Plant on Crows Landing Road — 2 miles from the Ceres city center and five mile south of Modesto — Almond 2 is expected to assist TID with meeting balancing authority obligations.

As one of five balancing authorities in State of California, TID must ensure power generation is matched with loads. In order to guarantee sufficient reserve generation capacity to meet whatever demands may arise on the grid, TID must operate their existing generators below their maximum potential.

Almond 2 is expected to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by over 57,000 tons per year by allowing other generators to operate at their most efficient levels. The development is also expected to help supplement the inconsistent wind power TID generates through its Tuolumne Wind Project.

Almond 2 would continue TID's tradition of building infrastructure internally rather than relying on long-line transmission, Weis said. Two new 115 kV transmission lines would connect Almond 2 to the proposed TID Grayson Substation, which is to be located about a half mile away.

The Almond 2 plant would make use of three 58-megawatt General Electric LM6000PG turbines — the first of the newest generation of generators — equipped with a water injection system and selective catalytic reduction system to control emissions. The fast-start, clean natural gas burning units would allow TID to turn generators on and off quickly to meet demand, while offering enough excess capacity that only two of three generators would function at most times.

Cooling water for Almond 2 would be sourced from the Ceres Wastewater Treatment Plant

through an existing pipeline to the Almond 1 Power Plant. PG&E would construct a new 8 to 11 mile natural gas pipeline, 8 inches in diameter, to convey natural gas to the facility.

California Energy Commissioner Julia Levin, presiding member of the committee overseeing TID's case, took some issue with plans to open a new natural gas plant rather than a more green alternative as preferred by the CEC's loading order preference. Levin questioned whether a biomass or biogas facility might be more appropriate to the region given the large amount of agriculture in the county.

"We do take this loading order very seriously," Levin said. "Given the importance of addressing climate change ... we do want to see the loading order followed."

TID staff said they would be unable to source the biowaste to power such a facility as farmers prefer to reuse their clippings as fertilizer. Also, given nearby the Stanislaus Resource Recovery Center garbage burning center, TID considered itself unlikely to receive air district approval for such a plan. TID has already secured air credits for a natural gas plant.

Many members of the public spoke on behalf of TID's efforts to help businesses reduce electricity use, including Amy Wolfe of G3 Enterprises, Martin Pohl, President of Hughson Nut Company, and Stanislaus County District 2 Supervisor Vito Chiesa. Chiesa also reiterated the need for the on-demand power generation that natural gas generators provide.

"We have to remember that wind doesn't always blow and water doesn't always fall," Chiesa said.

The CEC will assess the plan for the Almond 2 Power Plant in a state-mandated 12-month review process. A decision on whether or not the plant will be allowed is required from the CEC by July 1, 2010.

However, given the current lack of funds at the state level, the CEC could be forced to exceed that deadline.

"We all anticipate an expeditious AFC (Application for Certification) in this case and hope everything goes along swimmingly, but we recognize the realities," said CEC Hearing Officer Ken Celli.

Project information and documents are available at

<http://www.energy.ca.gov/sittingcases/almond/>

Written comments can be e-mailed to FMiller@energy.state.ca.us or sent to Felicia Miller, Project Manager, Siting, Transmission & Environmental Protection Division, California Energy Commission, 1516 Ninth Street, MS-15, Sacramento, CA, 95814. All comments must include the project name and docket number, "Almond 2 Power Plant Project, Docket 09-AFC-2.

State prepares for climate change

The first statewide plan in the country calls for adaptation and education. Public comment is sought.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, Aug. 4, 2009

Along with California's efforts to crack down on its own greenhouse gas emissions, state officials have begun preparing for the worst: heat waves, a rising sea level, flooding, wildlife die-offs and other expected consequences from what scientists predict will be a dramatic temperature increase by the end of this century.

California's Natural Resources Agency on Monday issued the nation's first statewide plan to "adapt" to climate change.

It offers strategies to cope with threats in seven sectors from firefighting to public health and water conservation. Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman called the plan an effort to acknowledge the problem and suggested that Californians "recognize their role in solving that problem and alter their behavior so that the change lasts."

The draft is "a good step in the right direction," said Gina Solomon of the Natural Resources Defense Council, an advocacy group.

"It highlights the importance of local adaptation planning, protecting vulnerable communities and the importance of public education."

But she cautioned: "These are all just words on paper without funding to carry them out."

"The federal government should help states to prepare for climate change. Spending some money now will save billions later, and these strategies save lives."

David Festa of the Washington-based Environmental Defense Fund voiced the hope that the report would "add urgency to our state's desperate water supply situation," noting that the Legislature will consider five new water-related bills when it reconvenes on Aug. 17.

In 2006, California adopted the nation's first comprehensive law to limit emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that scientists have found to be heating the planet.

Last year, state officials laid out a detailed plan to slash the state's emissions to 1990 levels in the next 11 years. And they began to adopt regulations, including the nation's first rule to mandate low-carbon fuel.

The public may submit comments to the draft over the next 45 days (e-mail address is adaptation@resource.ca.gov.) Public hearings will be held in Sacramento on Aug. 13 and in Los Angeles on a later date.

Power plant plan clears county hurdle

Air district issues emissions report

By Michael Burge, staff writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Wed., Aug. 5, 2009

CARLSBAD — The county Air Pollution Control District has given a green light to a power plant proposed for Carlsbad, saying it will not significantly increase health risks for residents.

However, a Carlsbad official said the city is still worried about plant emissions combined with exhaust from a future freeway widening project.

In a 117-page report issued yesterday on the proposed 540-megawatt power plant, the air district concludes emissions from the plant will not exceed federal and state standards for nitrous oxide and sulfur dioxide, which can cause various respiratory ailments, nor for carbon monoxide, a major pollutant.

The report also says the increased cancer risk from the plant will be less than one case per million residents, which it says is less than significant.

"Their results are that this plant does meet public-health goals," said George Piantka, the project manager for NRG Energy, which has applied to build the plant.

Piantka said the findings validate that NRG selected equipment that would minimize the risk to residents' and workers' health.

The air district's report goes to the California Energy Commission, which has final say over power plants.

The plant would be built just south of Agua Hedionda Lagoon on the west side of Interstate 5.

NRG has operated the 965-megawatt Encina Power Station on the same property since 1954 and wants the new plant running by the end of 2012.

The proposed plant would replace the three oldest of the five steam-powered turbines, so the old plant and its 400-foot-tall smoke stack would remain.

Carlsbad officials would like the plant moved farther inland to clear the beachfront property for a hotel and public use.

Joe Garuba, a municipal projects manager for Carlsbad, yesterday said the report doesn't erase the city's worries.

"One of the concerns we have is we'd like to see the cumulative analysis, especially with the widening of the freeway," Garuba said, referring to Interstate 5. "What's it mean to the citizens, especially those that live near the plant?"

The California Department of Transportation plans to widen Interstate 5 to possibly 14 lanes in much of Carlsbad, from eight to 10 lanes.

Feds raid Texas environmental waste company

By Arelis Hernandez, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wed., Aug. 5, 2009

HOUSTON—Federal officials have raided two facilities of an environmental waste company in southeast Texas where three workers have died in the last six months.

Davilyn Walston, spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney's office, said the Houston and Port Arthur facilities of CES Environmental Inc., were being searched Tuesday. Walston declined to provide more details.

Houston-based CES transports and disposes of organic waste. Several calls from The Associated Press to the company were not returned.

The Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigation Division served search warrants at both sites, a Justice Department spokesman said.

Stephen Dicker, a Houston police spokesman, said employees at the Houston site were sent home and the company was cooperating.

He said he expected the search there to last three days, but did not comment on the nature of the warrant. However, Dicker did say investigators were testing air quality there.

Port Arthur Justice of the Peace Tom Gillam said he began investigating the Port Arthur site after two workers died from inhaling hydrogen sulfide, a gas produced by human and animal waste. Gillam said he alerted federal authorities after he discovered that hydrogen sulfide contributed to two of the three deaths.

"It takes the oxygen out of you," Gillam said of the gas, "and it just chokes you."

On April 14, Charles Sittig, 48, of Eunice, La., died at the Port Arthur site of severe heart disease where exposure to the substance was a "contributing factor," he said.

Before that, an autopsy revealed that Joe Sutter, 36, of Arlington, Texas, died in December of asphyxiation caused by inhaling the gas, Gillam said.

"I had two deaths in four months where hydrogen sulfide was a contributing factor," he said, "and that's two too many."

In Houston, another worker was killed in a July fire while he was inspecting a tanker and a lantern ignited ethanol residue. His identity was not disclosed.

Neighbors have complained about odor and other problems at the Houston site since 2006, Dicker said. After two December explosions that damaged nearby homes, residents demanded the site be closed.

Greg Bowman, CES vice president of finance, told the Houston Chronicle that authorities were already at the company site when he arrived.

"They're doing what they think they need to do, and we're going to cooperate," Bowman told the Chronicle. "And we hope they finish what they need to do as quickly as possible."

In several news reports, Bowman has defended the company, citing improved operations, and has insisted that it complies with all government guidelines.