

Bay Area power plant gives Valley Air District \$644K to cut pollution in north Valley

Sun-Star staff

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Dec. 9, 2011

The owner of a Bay Area power plant fulfilled a commitment to help offset emissions in the Valley air basin today by providing the Valley Air District a check for \$644,503, to be used for pollution-reduction projects in the north Valley.

Mariposa Energy, LLC, the owner/operator of the Mariposa Power Plant in Alameda County, reached the agreement with the Air District in 2009. Although the simple cycle peaker power plant is located just outside the San Joaquin County line in the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, expected emissions from the plant may produce local impacts in the San Joaquin Valley air basin's northwest area. The funds will be used to support clean-air projects in the San Joaquin Valley to offset this potential local impact.

"We are delighted with the desire of Mariposa Energy to be a good neighbor to San Joaquin, even though it is under the jurisdiction of another air quality management district," said Leroy Ornellas, San Joaquin County Supervisor and a Governing Board member of the Air District.

"We do believe in being good neighbors and in building the cleanest, most environmentally sensitive projects we can," said Mariposa President Yasuyuki Asakura. "As air emissions do not respect county borders, we approached this issue from a regional basis and reached out to San Joaquin. We're happy to help our neighbors to the east with their air quality issues."

The plant, which will be operated on an "on call" basis during hours of peak power consumption as determined by the California Independent Systems Operator, is seven miles northeast of Tracy and 2.5 miles west of Mountain House in San Joaquin County. Potential emissions from the plant, which will begin operation in the third quarter of 2012, include nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and particulate matter, all of which are pollutants of concern in the Valley.

Similar to past emission reduction incentive programs sponsored by the Air District, the funds from this agreement will be used to the extent possible to support clean-air projects near Mountain House and Tracy, including replacement and retrofitting of heavy duty diesel engines and electrification of agricultural pump engines.

"Because of the unique characteristics of pollution in the Valley, we need to remain vigilant in our efforts to ensure that pollution from source outside the Valley do not impose added burden to the Valley residents and businesses," said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's air pollution control officer and executive director, in a news release.

On the right track

New locomotive in S.J. reduces pollution, costs

By Reed Fujii, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Friday, Dec. 9, 2011

Central California Traction Co. unveiled a new, bright red locomotive Thursday in Stockton, saying it should sharply reduce the short-line railroad's fuel bill and help ease air pollution in the Central Valley.

During a recent five-week test run, the new engine provided a 51 percent savings in fuel consumption as well as a roughly 85 percent reduction in emissions of nitrous oxides and a 90 percent reduction in particulate matter compared to older locomotives, said Dave Buccolo, CCT's general manger.

In the coming year, it is expected to keep 80,000 tons of nitrogen oxides and 2,300 tons of particulates out of the Valley's air.

"We've got the first ultra-low emissions locomotive here in San Joaquin County," he said.

The secret behind the new engine, designed and built by Brookville Equipment Corp. of Brookville, Pa., is that it is powered by three diesel engines, instead of one, and a computer control system that switches the engines on and off as load demands.

Buccolo said the locomotive, operating on CCT's short line between Stockton and Lodi, typically uses all three engines only when it starts on the 25-mile run and while switching cars on location. That amounts to just 1 percent of the time.

As it gains momentum, it switches to two engines, then one. It runs on two engines about 20 percent of the time, Buccolo said, meaning 79 percent of the time, the locomotive is powered by a single 700-horsepower diesel engine.

In addition, the Brookville locomotive can capture some of the energy generated when the train is braking - much like a hybrid car - and use it to power auxiliary systems, such as lights, fans and other electrical equipment.

Purchase of the \$1.4 million locomotive was underwritten by a federal Environmental Protection Agency grant aimed at reducing diesel emissions, which was administered through the California Air Resources Board and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"This is a good investment of public funds," said Leroy Ornellas, a San Joaquin County supervisor and Valley air district board member.

He said replacing an older locomotive with the ultra-low emissions technology "will allow the residents of Lodi and Stockton to breathe a little easier."

Dave Stanley, a Stockton resident and co-author of a pictorial history of Central California Traction Co., was at the company's yard off Cherokee and Sanguinetti lanes Thursday to witness the unveiling.

"It's exciting to see them move along into the 21st century, especially for such a small railroad," he said. "It's good to see an environmentally friendly locomotive out here."

Buccolo said rail transport also helps reduce the need for trucks on area highways, further reducing air pollutants and easing congestion.

The Lodi-Stockton short line moves about 10,000 rail cars a year, equivalent to about 40,000 truck deliveries, he said. CCT operations at the Port of Stockton move another 30,000 railcars annually, the equivalent of 120,000 trips by truck.

Buccolo said he plans to seek additional clean-air grants, hoping to eventually upgrade all six of his company's older locomotives with the new technology.

Arvin residents lead "toxic tour"

By Kellie Schmitt, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Dec. 9, 2011

As dust swirled around the outskirts of the controversial Lamont composting facility Thursday, a group of concerned local residents tried to describe the area's foul-smelling odors.

"Feces" was the response everyone quickly agreed on.

"There's something else, though," said Denny Larson, sniffing the hazy air as if it were a glass of fine wine. "It's not quite rotten cabbage."

Larson, a Bay Area-based expert in grassroots air monitoring efforts, joined Arvin residents and air advocates on what they called a "toxic tour" of southern Kern County. The so-called Arvin Bucket Brigade, which is receiving \$130,000 from The California Endowment to monitor their own air, wanted to highlight the region's possible polluters -- from dairies and fertilizer suppliers to auto repair shops.

Their hope is that their sampling could persuade government agencies and regulators to pay more attention to Arvin, home of some of the worst air in the country.

"The issue is there, but the problem is that the data isn't," said Gustavo Aguirre, the director of organizing for the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment. "This will give us tools to advocate for change."

The first stop on Thursday's tour was Community Recycling & Resource Recovery Inc. The company has been in hot water with the county and is being investigated by Cal-OSHA and other agencies after the October deaths of two brothers who apparently inhaled fatal doses of toxic fumes while working there.

At Community Recycling Thursday, the group members gathered their first gas sample even as a man in a large truck pulled up, locked the property gate and yelled that they were trespassing.

The group was not deterred – it was standing on the public easement on the side of the road – and instead opened its clear, plastic bucket and started pumping air into its special 10-liter inner bag.

The group sent that sample overnight to a lab in Simi Valley that can test for more than 75 volatile organic compounds and about 20 sulfur gasses.

"Sometimes you find strange things," said Larson, whose organization Global Community Monitor has helped residents test the air in many U.S locations as well as in India, Thailand and South Africa. He said Kern County's stench was comparable to odors he'd encountered in India and Africa.

But the real proof will come from the samples, not the nostrils. The bucket brigade will compare the levels found in its local sampling with health-based standards and see how they stack up. If they are high, it'll pass the results onto health and environment agencies in hopes that more official testing will follow.

After the recycling center, the rest of the "toxic tour" simply scouted out seven other area locations that may be included in future testing. The official training on how to use the bucket testers will be conducted in January.

"We're going to find out a lot more about what you guys are breathing," Larson told the handful of residents gathered Thursday.

What they were breathing Thursday seemed pretty dire to air activist Kevin Hall: "It's worse than I thought. The stench is shocking."

But for Sal Partida, the head of the resident group pushing for better Arvin air, said Thursday wasn't especially bad; he's smelled much worse.

Partida said he hopes the self-monitoring efforts will lead to change.

"We need all the help we can get," Partida said. "We're going to get somewhere with this."

Park change would speed up development of football fields

By Antonie Boessenkool, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Dec. 9, 2011

Youth football groups may be able to take advantage of fields at the Sports Village park sooner than expected if a change in the city's plans goes through.

The second phase of Sports Village was set to add eight soccer fields to the eight that were opened in the park last summer. But at a Community Services Committee meeting Thursday, city staff proposed building four of those as football fields and signing an agreement with a youth football group to maintain them.

In September, city council members voted to approve \$2.5 million in funding for the second phase of the park, which is planned to eventually include baseball, softball, football and soccer fields; a community center; picnic shelters; lake; trails; concession stands; and commercial development on about 200 acres.

The second phase is expected to cost \$3.2 million, and the city's Recreation and Parks Department is working on funding sources to make up the difference, which would help pay for lights on the fields, parking and restrooms, said City Manager Alan Tandy.

Sports Village is located off of Ashe Road and Taft Highway.

In the meantime, Golden Empire Youth Football, a Bakersfield organization for football and cheering for children ages 7 to 14, has needed a place to play, said Executive Director Ron White.

The organization is planning to play on fields at Kern County high schools and Bakersfield College, but with no dedicated fields for youth football and with participation expected to grow, "We're sort of bursting at the seams," White said.

"Part of the challenge for us is (we're) servicing about 2,500 participants," White said. "We're out of room. We play from sunup to sundown at six locations."

White said he believes the organization will grow to 4,000 participants in two to three years. He added the organization would like to bring state tournaments and a longer youth football season, nearly year-around, to the area.

Under the proposed agreement with Golden Empire, which still must be approved by the full city council, Golden Empire would maintain the four fields in Phase II. The American Youth Soccer Organization Region 73 is in an agreement with the city to maintain the eight soccer fields that opened in Phase I and would maintain four of the eight fields in Phase II.

Tandy said he hopes Golden Empire will help, through fundraising, with installing lights on the fields.

The Phase II fields are expected to be open for players in September 2013.

Eventually, the four football fields in Phase II will be changed to soccer fields as was originally planned, and four football fields and a "stadium field" that could be used for soccer or football will be built when construction proceeds on the rest of the park.

Dates for additional phases haven't been discussed and will depend on the housing market, Tandy said. The park is being built with park development fees from housing developments in the area.

Also at the meeting, city staff recommended that city council members approve an agreement with the anti-poverty organization Community Action Partnership of Kern to build a ball field behind the Friendship House Community Center, owned by the organization.

The agreement would use \$151,000 of city park improvement funds for the multiuse field, which could be used for soccer, softball and other sports, said Recreation and Parks Director Dianne Hoover.

Those funds were intended to fund a future park in a nearby area, northeast of Cottonwood Road and Watts Drive. Because there are no concrete plans for a park there currently, city staff recommended that the funds be used for the field at Friendship House.

"Southeast Bakersfield needs facilities like this," said Jeremy Tobias, executive director of the Community Action Partnership of Kern. "It'd be a wonderful opportunity for the neighborhood and also for our increased partnership (with the city)."

Hoover also presented a summary of the city's public pool usage in 2011, showing that attendance at the pools fell for a second year in a row. In 2011, pool attendance was about 91,500 visits, compared with a high point in 2009 of almost 115,600 visits.

Reasons for the decrease were the closure of two city pools in 2009, the summer pool season was one week shorter this year because of school schedules and there were fewer special events in the summer, among other factors, according to a report Hoover presented.

Finally, Planning Director Jim Eggert presented a proposal for the city to apply for funding to prepare a bicycle transportation plan. [The city would apply to the Rose Foundation's Kern County Air Pollution Mitigation Fund, a fund paid for by homebuilders to mitigate the effects of development on air quality.](#)

With funds from the Rose Foundation, the city could hire a consultant to draw up a bicycle transportation plan. With that plan, the city could then apply for state funding under Caltrans' Bicycle Transportation Account, Eggert said.

This would be for projects that are in addition to the bike routes currently covered by the city's bikeway master plan. It would instead be for building things like additional bicycle paths and facilities and lockers for cyclists, said Public Works Director Raul Rojas.

House blocks nonexistent rule on farm dust

By Mary Clare Jalonick, Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Hanford Sentinel and other papers, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2011

WASHINGTON -- The House has passed a bill to prevent the Environmental Protection Agency from cracking down on farm dust, even though the agency says it has no plans to regulate that pollution.

The idea that farm dust could be regulated has proved a popular topic on the campaign trail, riding a wave of anti-regulation sentiment. Republicans and some Democrats have told farm-state audiences that the EPA is considering a crackdown on farms, even though the agency issued a public statement in October calling that a "myth."

Environmental Protection Agency officials have said repeatedly that they won't propose new regulations to limit dust stirred up by farm equipment. But sponsors say the bill - which passed 268-150, with the support of 33 Democrats - will give more certainty to the agriculture industry and ward off potential lawsuits over the dust.

The House GOP has pushed a host of measures this year aimed at weakening, delaying or scrapping environmental regulations, saying they view them as job killers.

"This bill is a strong step in the right direction to reduce regulatory uncertainty," said South Dakota Rep. Kristi Noem, the Republican sponsor of the farm dust legislation. She added that the EPA's words "are empty promises until we back them up with real action."

Other Republican supporters of the bill appeared to completely ignore the EPA's statements that there will be no new regulations.

"Where's the EPA going to be next, checking under my bed for dust bunnies?" asked Rep. Blake Farenthold, R-Texas. "The EPA's regulations on this are the height of overreach."

Democratic opponents said the bill is a waste of time and written so broadly that it could go beyond just preventing farm dust, exempting mine operations and other industrial activities as well.

"It's not really about farms at all," said California Rep. Henry Waxman, the top Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

The White House said Wednesday that President Barack Obama will veto the bill if it comes to his desk. An administration policy statement said the "ambiguously written bill would create high levels of regulatory uncertainty regarding emission control requirements that have been in place for years."

The statement added that the legislation "purports to address a problem that does not exist."

The bill is not expected to pass in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

The dust flap dates back several years, to when Republican President George W. Bush's EPA proposed regulating rural and urban areas more equally when it comes to "coarse particulate matter" - or soot - in the air. Farms could fall under the tighter restrictions. Farm groups

challenged that in court, and a federal appeals court ruled in February 2009 that the EPA had already provided the evidence necessary to determine farm dust "likely is not safe."

Obama's EPA initially defended that decision. An EPA spokeswoman said after the ruling that regardless of whether someone lives in a rural or urban area, the threshold for unsafe levels of dust in the air should remain consistent nationally. But later, Jackson said the agency was unlikely to single out farm dust.

Under current rules, states are tasked with making sure that their levels of particulate matter in the air are below certain levels. Farm groups have worried, however, that their pollution - dust kicked up behind a combine, for example - would be targeted separately.

"Cattlemen and women worried about being fined for moving cattle, tilling a field or even driving down a dirt road should rest assured knowing that will not be allowed to happen on our watch," National Cattlemen's Beef Association President Bill Donald said in a statement after the vote.

One major farm group called the bill a waste of time, however. National Farmers Union President Roger Johnson said misinformation spreading across the country has created unnecessary concern for farm country.

"Congress should stop politicizing this issue and move on to passing meaningful legislation to help farmers, ranchers and rural communities," Johnson said.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2011:](#)

Arvin residents plan to monitor their air pollution

By Mark Grossi

Suspicious Arvin residents are checking pollution in their air with the help of an activist group that teaches communities how to do the monitoring themselves.

Arvin once led the nation in ozone violations, but state officials have moved the small city's monitor. In a new location, the city's monitor now does not record as many violations.

Residents say they do not think authorities are doing enough to protect their health. By doing their own air monitoring, the residents say they will have more information to pressure authorities into taking action.

Residents are getting help from Global Community Monitoring, which has helped communities with monitoring in many countries