

Oildale's newest filling station seen as improving local air quality

By John Cox

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A new public filling station just off Highway 65 in Oildale was celebrated Thursday as a boon to local air quality.

The station, owned and operated by San Diego-based Sempra Energy's Southern California Gas Co., sells only compressed natural gas from sources considered renewable, such as dairy digesters, landfills, food processing plants and wastewater facilities.

Modern, heavy-duty trucks running on compressed natural gas are estimated to put out 90 percent less smog-inducing emissions and 80 percent less greenhouse gases than conventional vehicles fueled by diesel.

The station's posted price Thursday — \$2.05 for 125 cubic feet — was attractive, too. SoCalGas said that amount of natural gas is the energy equivalent of a gallon of gasoline.

"Did anyone fill up for that price this morning?" company representative Rob Duchow asked a crowd of local dignitaries and others gathered at the station for a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday morning.

The station is capable of fueling up to two heavy-duty trucks in 12 minutes. It is one of 15 renewable natural gas, or RNG, stations operated by SoCalGas. The closest one to the Bakersfield area is in Lancaster.

The company said it wants RNG to comprise one-fifth of its natural gas sales by 2030. It said the use of RNG as a transportation fuel has jumped almost 600 percent during the last five years.

Locating the station near the intersection of highways 65 and 99 was deemed ideal, SoCalGas executives said, because the corridors serve Kern's agriculture and logistics industries.

"We couldn't have chosen a better location," said Jeff Walker, SoCalGas Vice President of Customer Solutions. He added that the station is one of the largest in its service territory.

Politicians and business-community leaders attending Thursday's event welcomed the new station as a helpful investment in not only clean air but the local economy as well.

"This is a major deal when it comes to air quality and transportation," said county Supervisor David Couch, whose Fourth District includes the station. Because the station is located within an economic opportunity zone, he added, the resulting increase in property tax valuations will be invested in the immediate area.

Nick Ortiz, president and CEO of the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce, praised the project as representing new jobs and economic investment. He also called it further evidence of Kern's all-of-the-above strategy to energy production.

"We're doing it the best in the state of California, maybe the best in the whole country," he said.