Tallow neighbors breathe sigh of relief

BY OLIVIA RUIZ / Vida En El Valle
Vide en el Valle Wed. Nov. 5, 2008

After putting up with the foul odor coming from Modesto Tallow on Crows Landing Road for many years, Rufino González said he is a happy man today because the plant has disappeared.

"Every time I went outside my house, I had to hold my nose because I couldn't stand the smell," said the 67-year-old González, who has lived in the area for more than 20 years. "Many times I would stay bored inside my house so that I wouldn't have to smell the odor."

The Tallow company, which had been in operation for 91 years, was forced to shut its doors following a number of complaints lodged with the San Joaquín Valley Air Pollution Control District. The plant will shut down by February.

Fires discouraged under air-quality program

By Niesha Lofing
Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Thursday, November 6, 2008

Thinking of lighting a crackling fire in your hearth tonight? Maybe another time.

Today is the first day that burning is being discouraged under the Check Before You Burn program, administered by the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District. The program began Saturday and runs through February.

The elevated levels of particulate matter in the air prompted the recommendation, which applies to burning in Sacramento County communities.

Burning is discouraged when particulate matter levels are forecast between 26 and 35 micrograms per cubic meter, according to an e-mail alert issued by the air district.

The air quality is expected to be moderate today, the e-mail states.

The program affects residents in Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, Isleton, Rancho Cordova, and Sacramento.

To sign up for e-mail air quality and burn alerts, go to http://www.sparetheair.com/burncheck.cfm

Calif. defeats clean power, fuel measures

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer
Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, November 5, 2008

LOS ANGELES At first blush, California's environmentally conscious voters were likely to back two ballot measures for clean energy and alternative fuel.

But their defeat Tuesday appeared to say more about the initiatives than it did about California's green image.

"People are concerned about global warming. They want to know what to do about it, but I think they realized voting for these initiatives is not solving the problem," said Jim Metropulos, a senior advocate Sierra Club California.

Propositions 7 and 10, which mostly were funded by out-of-state billionaires, sought to bolster California efforts to clean up its smoggy air and slash greenhouse gas emissions.

But environmentalists were outspoken in opposition to both measures, warning they could hamper California's ongoing efforts on renewable energy and alternative fuels.

Proposition 7 would have created the country's most aggressive renewable energy mandate in a state that is already surpassing most other state efforts. The measure would have required utilities to generate half their electricity from windmills, solar systems, geothermal reserves and other renewable sources by 2025.

Critics said it would have driven up electricity rates, delayed the state's transition to clean power and put small renewable energy companies out of business. The initiative included a vague wording that some feared could have excluded renewable energy ventures of less than 30 megawatts from meeting the state target.

"It would have made the process for getting more renewables unbelievably complicated and would have killed the small solar industry overnight," said David Pettit, a senior attorney, at the Natural Resources Defense Council in Santa Monica.

The Sierra Club, the California League of Conservation Voters and other environmental groups also opposed the higher mandate. So did the small renewable energy companies that supporters argued would get more business.

With 69 percent of the vote counted early Wednesday, nearly two-thirds of voters had rejected the measure.

Supporters argued that California's utilities should be forced to boost their purchases of renewable energy if the state was going to clean up its smoggy air and slash greenhouse gas emissions.

The large shareholder-owned utilities already are struggling to meet California's current mandate of using 20 percent renewable power by 2010. Municipal utilities, whose renewable programs are voluntary, would have had to comply with the new target had voters approved Proposition 7.

Pacific Gas & Electric Corp., Edison International and Sempra Energy spent nearly $30 million to defeat Proposition 7.

The measure's financing came primarily from billionaire Peter Sperling, whose father founded the University of Phoenix. He gave $9 million to support the initiative.

Steve Hopcraft, a spokesman for the campaign, said the initiative's loss "is truly a missed opportunity" on moving California's renewable energy policy forward.

The outcome for a renewable mandate was different in Missouri where voters there adopted a mandate requiring the state to produce 15 percent of its electricity from clean energy by 2021. However, that benchmark is still behind California's existing target.

Proposition 10 would have given Californians rebates to buy alternative fuel vehicles and set aside money for research.

Critics warned the $5 billion bond measure would have steered taxpayer money to Texas billionaire T. Boone Pickens. The natural gas fueling company he founded, Clean Energy Fuels Corp., gave nearly $19 million to bond initiative.

Opponents have raised just $125,000, although they formed a diverse coalition of environmentalists, business and union groups, and top politicians from around the state.

With 69 percent of the vote counted early Wednesday, roughly 61 percent of voters rejected the measure.

It would have provided rebates of up to $50,000 for buyers of vehicles that run on natural gas and other alternative fuels. The measure also would set aside money for research.

Supporters have said providing rebates would put less polluting cars on the road and reduce the state's addiction to foreign oil.

Campaign spokeswoman Amy Thoma said she believes their measure failed over concerns about the economy.

"We think Californians are supportive of moving toward to renewable technology but maybe the timing, at this time, wasn't amazing," Thoma said.

LA voters OK $7 billion bond to repair schools

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, November 06, 2008

LOS ANGELES—Voters have overwhelmingly approved a $7 billion bond to repair and upgrade schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District—the latest of several construction bonds passed by voters to ease overcrowding in the nation's second largest district.

The bond, one of the largest ever for a California school district, passed with nearly 69 percent of the vote from Tuesday's election. Voters had already approved $13.6 billion since 1997 through four construction bonds.

Opponents of the measure charged that district is spending money unnecessarily because enrollment is declining. The district has about 694,000 students, down 57,000 students from its peak in 2002.

But supporters say enrollment is expected to start rising again in 2015 and school facilities have long been neglected.

The $7 billion will be used, in part, to repair and upgrade some 800 older facilities, replace older school buses, improve air quality and energy efficiency. The bond will cost property taxpayers $33.69 per $100,000 of assessed value annually from 2013 to 2044.

EU business lobby opposes pollution fees plan

By ROBERT WIELAARD, The Associated Press
Washington Post Thursday, November 6, 2008

BRUSSELS, Belgium -- The EU business lobby urged the European Union Thursday to drop anti-pollution plans that could increase costs for companies, saying the current financial crisis is already badly hurting their competitiveness.

The EU plans would force industries to buy all pollution permits -- which are now free -- in the future.

The financial turmoil and subsequent economic downturn already force companies into "drastic" cost control and they must be spared the fate having to pay for pollution permits that are now free, BusinessEurope said.

"Being the world's largest exporter, Europe is particularly dependent on internationally competitive companies," said BusinessEurope, which represents 20 million small, medium and large companies.

EU governments and the European Parliament are finalizing legislation to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 percent from 1990 levels by 2020.

Those rules would expand an existing cap-and-trade program, requiring more companies -- and even airlines -- to buy permits to pollute.

Today those permits are free, given to companies by governments. Companies -- mainly in the energy sector -- can sell the permits to others if they release fewer emissions than they are allocated. This allows them to profit by polluting less.

But critics say the system gives money away to companies and that they should buy the permits in the first place.

The EU wants all permits to be auctioned off by 2020. It says this would allow governments to raise up to 50 billion euros ($64 billion) a year -- money that could be devoted to developing renewable energy. It admits that auctioning could eventually hike electricity prices by 10 to 15 percent.

BusinessEurope said it supports the EU's climate targets but "the requirement to purchase allowances ... adds to the cost burdens already imposed in meeting the mandatory emission reduction targets," it added.

Auctioning permits will not lead to more emission cuts but "merely shift capital from the private sector to the state" and hinder investments in green and clean technologies, it said. "Therefore investment and production will gradually move out of the EU leading to job losses."

It called for the EU to continue with free permits for all manufacturing industries as long as there is no international agreement placing equivalent emission-cutting burden worldwide.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

EUROPEAN UNION

Nations to Consider Soft Loans for Car Sector

Washington Post Wednesday, November 5, 2008

E.U. nations will consider giving car makers soft loans to help them build more fuel-efficient vehicles as the region tightens standards on greenhouse gas emissions, French Finance Minister Christine Lagarde said.

E.U. car companies are seeking $52 billion from governments so they can invest in green technology. They say slumping sales and tight credit markets make it hard for them to fund the switch to less-polluting cars themselves.

L.A. Daily News Editorial, Thursday, November 6, 2008:

L.A. must retain Palmdale airport plan

For residents of the metropolitan area, who know all too well the miseries of the 405 Freeway and Los Angeles International Airport, airport regionalization is a no-brainer. If we could distribute our traffic among multiple airports - as other major U.S. metropolises do - we could ease up freeway congestion, reduce air pollution and greatly improve the quality of life throughout Southern California.

Unfortunately for the rest of us, the airlines and the L.A. City Hall crowd like LAX exactly the way it is. For the airlines, funneling a staggering 61 million passengers through LAX each year means needing to staff only one facility. At L.A. City Hall, it means getting to keep all airport-related sales-tax revenues.

Oh, sure, L.A. city leaders pretend they support regionalization. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa championed it when campaigning in Westchester and Playa del Rey in 2005. But they will latch on to any excuse they can find to drop the idea.

Just look at the way they're now bailing out on Palmdale.

Last month, United Airlines, which had been running flights to San Francisco out of Palmdale, decided to halt the service. It was an unfortunate move, but given the state of the economy, understandable. Most of United's Palmdale flights were two-thirds empty.

But now, seizing on United's withdrawal, L.A.'s airports agency, Los Angeles World Airports, has opted to drop Palmdale from regional plans. "There is no viability in service at Palmdale," claims Mike Molina, LAWA senior director of government affairs.

That seems hard to believe.

In recent years, the Antelope Valley has been one of the fastest-growing regions in Southern California. And, according to a study from SH&E International Air Transport Consultancy, as many as 682,000 residents of the Antelope Valley and other northeast L.A. County communities regularly fly out of LAX.

That's a lot of cars jamming the 5 and 405 freeways - and a lot of people who would probably be thrilled for an alternative to LAX, if only a viable one existed.

The problem is that airport regionalization is something of a chicken-and-egg situation: Travelers won't use outlying airports until there are numerous, convenient and economic options available, and airlines don't want to create those options until there is an established customer base.

That's where LAWA and other Los Angeles city officials have to step in. By capping growth at LAX and encouraging the use of other regional airports, they can create the pressure for regionalization that the area desperately needs.

To its credit, LAWA spent $5 million on Palmdale Airport, but that was more under duress than out of conviction. Supporting regionalization efforts was a condition of a lawsuit settlement the city entered into over its botched plan to spend $11 billion expanding LAX. Now city leaders seem to think the economic downturn justifies their reneging on that agreement.

But the economy will recover eventually. The Southland's population will keep growing. To prepare for the future, officials must be committed to using every area airport to relieve traffic around LAX - and that includes the Palmdale airport.