

Contentious concrete plant OK'd by planners

By James Burger, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Aug. 28, 2009

Third time's a charm for Mark Polhamus.

Kinda.

A controversial concrete recycling plant proposed by Polhamus near Allen and Hageman roads in Rosedale got a lukewarm approval from the Kern County Planning Commission Thursday night after being delayed at two previous meetings.

Neighbors have strongly opposed the project.

They are concerned about dust, noise and traffic from the project degrading the quality of life in the surrounding housing tracts.

But commissioners took an audience suggestion and ran with it -- approving a conditional use permit that will allow Polhamus to move forward with plans to crush concrete into road base on the industrial land.

But commissioners put a two-year time limit on their approval.

Polhamus' ability to do business will run out after those two years and he will have to apply for the permit again.

The idea came from area resident Catherine Merlo, who got involved in the dispute just this week.

"The two-year permit is a good solution. It allows residents to watch and make sure (their) concerns are addressed. It (also) allows the company to do business," she said.

But other neighbors were not happy to see the project approved at all.

"We felt the planning commission let us down. They chose a quick fix instead of the correct fix. We are left to police this project," said neighborhood resident Carol Bender.

Kelly Francisco, an attorney for Polhamus, thanked the commission for considering the project.

Both Polhamus and the neighbors said they would consider appealing the commission's decision to the Kern County Board of Supervisors.

During the hearing, neighbors and the developers' representative dueled back and forth over who invaded the other party's turf first.

"This is clearly a case of urban encroachment on agricultural land uses," said project spokeswoman Darcy Larman.

She said homeowners chose to purchase property close to the agricultural land, the traffic mess at Hageman Road, Allen Road and Santa Fe Way and the industrial land her client has his business on.

Bender made the point that, despite the fact the property was zoned industrial, Polhamus brought his lowbed trucking business in after the homes were built.

"We didn't encroach on the plant. The plant would encroach on us," said Tom Smethurst, who bought his home in the area in the 1990s.

Prescribed fire leads to Yosemite evacuations

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, August 28, 2009

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif.—About two dozen private cabins have been evacuated in Yosemite National Park after a prescribed burn in the area swelled out of control.

Officials ordered the evacuations in an area called Foresta around 1 a.m. Thursday.

Wednesday's prescribed burn was supposed to consume only about 90 acres, but quickly grew to 1,170 acres overnight and shut down a section of Highway 120 through the park. The blaze is now about 10 percent contained.

Smoke from the blaze has filled the valley, and Yosemite officials say it's obscured some of the popular park views.

Park spokeswoman Kari Cobb says the area initially had met the criteria for a prescribed burn: winds were light, air quality good and the moisture was in the proper range.

Hearing this week on Hayward power plant permit

By Eric Kurhi

The Oakland Tribune, Monday, August 31, 2009

HAYWARD — With a final permit pending for Calpine's Russell City Energy Center, air quality regulators are holding a public hearing this week on the proposed 600-megawatt plant near the Hayward shoreline.

If past meetings are any indication, they're sure to get an earful — there's a long line of opponents who have spoken out against the plant at every opportunity.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District issued a draft permit in June that states the natural gas-fired plant would not excessively pollute the air. Previous concerns regarding greenhouse gases resulted in a requirement that the facility use the cleanest technology possible — the only way to control emissions, states the report.

Calpine officials call natural gas a "transitional" or "bridge" fuel, the best possible source of energy until viable alternatives are developed.

"The power is needed for reliability — the wind doesn't always blow, and the sun doesn't always shine," said Richard Thomas, vice president of project development for Calpine. "And it allows for the shutdown of old and aging power plants in the region."

Thomas said the natural gas-fired plant is 40 percent more efficient than most such facilities, and far less polluting than older models — such as the Potrero Generating Station in San Francisco — that could be taken offline.

Opponents say it's not just a case of "not in my backyard." Many spoke at a Hayward Area Recreation and Park District meeting Aug. 24.

Some say they don't see the need to build fossil fuel plants at all, that it is primitive technology sure to be obsolete soon.

Others fear the plant would set a precedent for heavy industrial use at the shoreline.

"Almost immediately after (Russell City) was approved, Tierra put in an application for the Eastshore Energy Center," said JoAnne Gross, a lifelong Hayward-area resident who has spoken out repeatedly against both plants. "If it's built, it would be the worst thing that's ever happened to Hayward."

HARD board member Minane Jameson, who led her colleagues to pass a resolution opposing the plant, said the city has "an image problem."

"Our schools are suffering, crime is high, property values are low, and we are working to change that," she said. "But this is going the wrong way. It's a visual that stands out and will be the first thing people see when they come in over the (Hayward-San Mateo) Bridge."

Labor groups have rallied behind the plant as a potential job maker, and Calpine secured support from the Hayward Chamber of Commerce and Councilman Bill Quirk.

"I looked into it very carefully, and (emissions) are all well below the health risk limits," said Quirk. "It would be that much less energy coming from coal-powered plants. ... Bringing this plant online is the environmentally correct thing to do."

Smog-producing leaf blowers can be exchanged for cleaner models

By Raja Abdulrahim, staff writer
L.A. Times, Friday, Aug. 28. 2009

Give us your tired, your old, your smog-producing leaf blowers, yearning... to be replaced by more environmentally friendly blowers.

Registration is ongoing at locations around the region in an annual exchange for professional gardeners and landscapers to trade in older, highly polluting backpack leaf blowers for quieter, low-emission units. The exchange is organized by the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

Up to 1,500 new leaf blowers -- which the agency says will reduce smog-forming pollutants by 21 tons each year -- will be sold for less than half their retail price at the events, held at 11 locations around the southland. The old blowers will be fed -- and given new life -- to the Beast Recycler.

As Md. Praises the Green Amid the Blacktop, Skeptics Continue to See Red

By Katherine Shaver
Washington Post, Sunday, August 30, 2009

After decades of controversy over an Intercounty Connector's environmental impacts, Maryland roads officials are billing it as "one of America's greenest highways."

At an open house Saturday, officials said the highway will filter dirty rain water before it rushes from asphalt into streams and help deer and other animals safely cross beneath six lanes of traffic via specially designed culverts.

"We realize we can't completely alleviate all the concerns, but we want people to understand we take this very seriously," said project spokeswoman Fran Counihan as about 45 people chatted with ICC employees at the new National Capital Trolley Museum, which is yet to open. The state paid \$5.63 million to move and rebuild the museum on Bonifant Road because it was in the highway's path.

With maps and posters, state officials spent three hours yesterday talking up efforts to reduce and repair damage to wetlands, woodlands, wildlife and air quality as the 18.8-mile highway is built between Gaithersburg and Laurel.

But Saturday's audience was full of skeptical residents and environmental activists.

"It's an environmental disaster," said Arnie Gordon, president of the Norbeck Meadows Civic Association, which includes residents 100 feet from the ICC route.

The environmental effects of the east-west highway have been the major sticking point during 50 years of community debate, political wrangling and legal challenges. When Maryland officials won a federal lawsuit that fought the project on environmental grounds in 2007, allowing construction to start, they highlighted \$370 million worth of construction designs and restoration work as proof of their environmental commitment.

The \$2.56 billion highway's first seven-mile section, between Interstate 370 and Georgia Avenue, is halfway complete and scheduled to open late next year. Work is underway on the rest of the road, which is scheduled to open by early 2012. Public hearings on a toll schedule, which could be announced by Sept. 23, are set for this fall.

Mike Baker, the project's environmental construction manager, said cooling and filtering rain water after it runs off the highway is a "huge focal point" of the project.

A summer thunderstorm can send 85-degree water full of oil and road debris into streams where fish, bugs and other wildlife survive in water temperatures of 68 to 72 degrees, he said. Building the usual roadside storm water runoff ponds would have required taking more parkland, Baker said. Instead, the project includes an underground filtration and cooling system in its particularly ecologically sensitive areas. He said it is one of the most extensive such systems tried on a United States highway.

Mark and Ondine Doore, whose Colesville home is just south of the ICC route, said they questioned why it will have several "S" curves in an area near Redland and Muncaster Mill roads. State officials have said that alignment avoided more damage to nearby Rock Creek, but Mark Doore said the curves created a

longer route that will require vehicles to use more gas and make diesel trucks louder and more polluting as they slow down and speed up.

He also questioned the state's decision to run the highway through the Cashell Estates neighborhood in Derwood, where homes have been demolished.

Clean and green

By Jennifer Davies, Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Saturday, August 29, 2009

If you want to live a truly green life, you may want to rethink your dry-cleaning habits. Many local dry cleaners use perchloroethylene, or perc, which is a potential carcinogen, to clean your delicates.

That will change eventually, as California regulators have banned the use of the substance by 2023. While that might seem like a long way off, part of the rules require dry cleaners who use that chemical to get rid of their perc machines that are 15 years old or older by July 2010.

Several new technologies have emerged, but the Sierra Club says not all so-called dry-cleaning practices are equal. One good option is to have your clothes wet-cleaned, which many dry cleaners already do on hardier clothes that have tough stains. Another option for more delicate fabrics is the carbon dioxide method, which uses high pressure to get items clean. It has no reported health risks, but it is pricey.

Gordon Shaw, owner of Hangers Cleaners (hangerssandiego.com), which has locations throughout San Diego County, says he is one of the few dry cleaners locally to use the CO2 method. Whereas he charges about \$8 to dry-clean a pair of pants, Shaw says those using perc or other methods will charge between \$5 and \$6.

The Sierra Club also says to stay away from dry cleaners who use hydrocarbon solvents, which are petroleum-based and not entirely earth-friendly. Another process widely used throughout California is called GreenEarth. Despite its name, the Sierra Club says to avoid GreenEarth because it uses methyl siloxane, or D5, which an EPA study found caused uterine tumors in rats who were exposed to high doses.

The best way to figure out what type of technique a dry cleaner uses is to ask specifics, not just, "Are you green?" Just because there's a sign with a picture of a leaf out front doesn't mean the dry cleaner is the best eco-choice. Another option is to call the San Diego Air Pollution Control District at (858) 586-2707. They keep track of all the dry cleaners who use perc or hydrocarbons, says Anita Tinsely, a spokeswoman for the district. If you want to find dry cleaners that use the CO2 method, you can check findco2.com. But keep in mind that aside from Hangers Cleaners, you won't find many local options.

One way you can try to skip the dry-cleaning altogether is to buy clothes that don't need special treatment, or try to clean them yourself. Many items, like cashmere, don't need a dry cleaner's touch. In fact, the Cashmere and Camel Hair Manufacturers Institute actually recommends hand-washing knits with cold water and fine washable soap.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Sunday, Aug. 30, 2009:](#)

Walk this way - urge 'sustainable development

By Jared Huffman and Ethan Elkind

The real estate collapse has masked the existence of a severe housing shortage in California. While developers have oversupplied single-family detached homes with backyards, buyers looking for a home within walking distance of jobs, services, good schools, parks and public transit have few options in this state. Communities that have these "sustainable development" characteristics, such as neighborhoods in San Francisco, Pasadena and San Diego, are often among the most expensive in the state. They are also few and far between compared with the vast stretches of suburban homes covering the state.

So why is suburban sprawl the norm instead of housing close to shops, cafes and transit? The primary roadblock to this development is local land-use policies.

Yet market trends indicate that demand is increasing for walkable communities, particularly for retirees, couples without children, adult singles and other families who are not interested in the suburban lifestyle.

For the first time in the nation's history, the 2003 sales price per square foot for attached housing (the condominiums and townhouses that are central to sustainable development) was higher than the square-foot price of the detached housing that makes up suburban life. For a new generation of families, the pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods of parks, markets and urban amenities represent a more vibrant and exciting place to live than the suburbs of their parents' generation.

In addition to being in demand, sustainable development represents a critical means of combatting climate change. Auto pollution represents the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the state, and our auto-dependent development patterns are the direct cause. The Urban Land Institute's 2007 book, "Growing Cooler," concludes that even with future improvements in fuel efficiency, we will need to remove the roadblocks to sustainable development in order to fight climate change. And more compact, walkable neighborhoods create additional environmental benefits, such as preserving open space and agricultural land and reducing the air pollution that causes smog.

Local governments tend to restrict the type of housing, retail and jobs mixes that are central to sustainable development. Even with major transit stops in place, local restrictions stymie growth out of fear of increased traffic and a desire to preserve the "character of the neighborhood." But the reality is that these developments, when done right, often decrease traffic by allowing residents the option of walking more, and they typically become desirable places that boost nearby property values.

What can be done to make walkable communities commonplace? At a recent workshop with some of the state's leading sustainable developers and UCLA and Berkeley Law scholars, participants cited three key solutions:

- First, local governments need to develop comprehensive plans for walkable communities instead of undergoing project-by-project approvals that encourage haphazard and disconnected development.
- Second, state and federal governments should direct funds to support the infrastructure needs of areas ripe for sustainable development.
- Third, the state should allow local redevelopment agencies to raise revenue through "tax increment financing," which taxes the increase in property values associated with new neighborhood development. The revenue will fund the public investments necessary to build more walkable neighborhoods.

These policies have widespread support: A recent Public Policy Institute of California statewide survey that found that 78 percent of Californians support encouraging local governments to change land use and transportation planning so that people can drive less.

Ultimately, California's citizens will need to ask their elected leaders to allow and plan for sustainable development. It will benefit their communities and quality of life and will ensure that our state is doing its part to reduce the threat from climate change. The downturn in housing now provides us with an opportunity to plan for a new round of growth, building communities that residents want and forging a sustainable path for future generations.

Assembly member Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, is chair of the Legislative Environmental Caucus. Ethan Elkind is the Bank of America Climate Change Research Fellow at the UC Berkeley and UCLA Schools of Law and author of the report "Removing the Roadblocks: How to Make Sustainable Development Happen Now."

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Friday, Aug. 28, 2009:](#)

New hydrogen energy plant is a welcome addition to county's vulnerable economy

The Obama administration's announcement that it intends to pump \$308 million into a proposed Kern County energy project represents a potential economic shot in the arm for our region.

The Department of Energy's economic stimulus grant will go to help build and operate Hydrogen Energy California -- a 250 net-megawatt power plant using an innovative energy and emission control technology that will provide electricity for over 150,000 homes. However, the matching grant really means a \$600 million investment now, which will likely grow to be about \$2 billion, should state officials approve the

project. This will create a partnership between government and industry-leading energy companies which will translate into new jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenues for the local economy.

Unlike conventional fossil fuel power plants, Hydrogen Energy California will use a safe form of hydrogen to power turbines. Using hydrogen for power generation means smog-forming emissions will be very low, so the facility should meet the most stringent clean-air standards established for our county.

The hydrogen is obtained by taking petroleum coke left over from refining, along with locally delivered coal, and then converting them to hydrogen and carbon dioxide. Ninety percent of the carbon dioxide -- a potent greenhouse gas believed to contribute to global climate change -- is then captured and stored deep underground in depleted oil and gas reservoirs.

This "carbon capture and storage" technology, endorsed by the Department of Energy, has been used for years to extend the life of oil fields from Texas to Canada to the North Sea, and it may prove to be helpful in prolonging the life of local fields as well.

The Hydrogen Energy California project is a perfect example why Kern EDC markets this county as part of the Southern California economy. While Hydrogen Energy International, the project's sponsor, had originally planned to site its project in Carson, adjacent to its Long Beach headquarters, the company concluded that Kern County was the ideal location due to its proximity to oil production facilities, appropriate geology for CO2 storage and the necessary infrastructure, including roads, non-potable water resources and electrical transmission lines. The plant is not the only Los Angeles Basin project that has relocated to Kern County over the last year. Men's Wearhouse recently leased the largest vacant industrial building in Bakersfield and brought 250 jobs from its former San Fernando Valley location.

In addition, the project positions Kern County as a cutting-edge leader because successful carbon-capture methods used here can be exported to the rest of the country and the world thanks to California's influence as an environmental innovator. More tangibly, and vitally important to our economy, is the fact that the Hydrogen Energy California power plant will provide 1,500 new jobs during the construction phase with over 100 permanent jobs at completion. With unemployment currently over 14 percent, Hydrogen Energy California represents a new form of energy for America and economic opportunity where it's most needed.

Robin Fleming is a business developer for the Kern Economic Development Corp. Her areas of specialty are the energy, chemical, aerospace and defense industries.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blogs, Friday, Aug. 28, 2009](#)

Diesel truck rules are not delayed

By Mark Grossi

A few folks from the trucking industry called after our story Thursday about the delay in the Valley's ozone cleanup deadline. They wanted to know if the state's new diesel rule is delayed, too.

The rule approved by the California Air Resources Board was not delayed or changed in any way by the EPA approval for the Valley. Truckers who are in the process of complying with the rules should continue, authorities say.

The story Thursday referred only to the Valley's ozone plan, which experts say will be helped immensely by state-required diesel improvements that will begin very soon.

One trucking industry source puts it this way:

"There are fleet rules enacted by the ARB over the past nine years that require upgrades and replacement of everything from transit buses, trash trucks, municipal trucks and trucks serving the Port of Stockton or Valley railyards. In the case of the Statewide Truck and Bus Rule, the rule development proceeded over the past three years and is scheduled to be finalized in the next 60 days after being approved by ARB last December."

Pay attention to the air forecast

Ozone readings are climbing, especially in Fresno, so sports participants should pay close attention to the forecasts from day to day in late August and early September.

But now there's another reason to be more aware of air quality. Forest fires are burning south, east and west of the San Joaquin Valley, meaning smoke and PM-2.5 could be wafting into this region.

If you can smell smoke, the PM-2.5 is probably pretty thick in the air. The double whammy of smoke and ozone is hard on lungs.

Consider suspending sports or band practice -- or any other vigorous outdoor exercise -- for a day or so until the air clears.

[Letter to the N.Y. Times, Sunday, Aug. 30, 2009:](#)

The True Cost of Energy

In "China Racing Ahead of U.S. in Drive to Go Solar" (front page, Aug. 25), you say "solar energy remains far more expensive to generate than energy from coal, oil, natural gas or even wind."

This is simply not true if you consider the environmental costs. The coal, oil and natural gas companies currently do not pay for the majority of pollution costs they produce. Nor do their customers. Taxpayers do.

Coal mining and other resource extraction destroy water systems, land arability and air quality. Burning fossil fuels causes global warming. We do not pay for these costs when we are charged for our electricity by the kilowatt hour. We pay for these costs as taxpayers and citizens — in health care, water cleanup, destroyed land, ecosystem destruction, future fuel costs and national security (protecting oil pipelines and going to war in places where we have no business other than oil).

When the global warming bills start coming due, the real cost of energy from coal, oil and natural gas will be more clearly understood. Every time someone repeats that coal, oil and natural gas are cheap energies, it is a dangerous precept for any business or policy decision.

*Amy Larkin
Director, Greenpeace Solutions
New York*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA authorizes 20 million dollars to eliminate older vehicles that run on diesel. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Otorga EPA 20 millones de dólares para eliminar viejos vehículos de diesel

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Friday, August 28, 2009

La Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA) anunció esta mañana que otorgó 20 millones de dólares del paquete de estímulo económico para sustituir viejos vehículos que consumen diesel por nuevos con mejor rendimiento.

La EPA recordó que en total cuenta con unos 300 millones de dólares para financiar ese tipo de sustitución vehicular en lugares claves para mejorar la calidad del aire y la salud.

De acuerdo con el programa de sustitución, cambiar los motores o vehículos obsoletos y contaminantes ayuda a reducir las muertes prematuras, previene el asma y otras enfermedades respiratorias, y contribuye a la productividad pues previene ausencias laborales por enfermedad.