

Air district links stink to refinery

By MATT WEISER, Bakersfield Californian staff writer, December 10, 2002, 10:55:13 PM

The Shell Oil Co. refinery in Bakersfield has been fingered as the source of a noxious smell that descended over the city Nov. 12, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The smell lasted for several hours and prompted dozens of complaint calls that morning. At least seven people visited local hospitals reporting breathing difficulty as a result of the odor, and hundreds of people were evacuated from several buildings, including the air district's own Bakersfield offices.

After a nearly monthlong investigation, the air district on Tuesday issued two notices of violation against the Shell Bakersfield refinery on Rosedale Highway: one for creating a nuisance, and another for having an inoperative vapor recovery system. According to the air district, the smell resulted from this inoperative system, which is intended to collect hydrocarbon vapors from tanks at the refinery.

The refinery's operating permit requires it to have a functioning vapor recovery system on certain tanks, and the air district found that it wasn't working properly that morning.

"We can't say specifically what substance in this case caused the odor," said air district spokeswoman Kelly Hogan Malay.

She said Shell cooperated with the investigation, which now will be handed off to the district's mutual settlement department for resolution. Malay said Shell could receive a fine reaching into the tens of thousands of dollars, depending on the outcome of the settlement.

Shell spokesman Cameron Smyth said the company is reviewing the violation notices.

"We're not 100 percent certain that the violations are warranted," Smyth said. "We did an internal investigation and our findings are not 100 percent in concurrence with the district's."

Malay said it's not uncommon for an investigation like this to take so long.

"In a situation where there is a widespread odor, it's not a quick process. The air district has to be very thorough in its investigation," she said.

The district's investigators looked at that day's weather and results from the district's monitoring stations in Bakersfield to trace the source back to the refinery, she said.

Tejon hopes to get OK to grow

By DAVIN McHENRY, Californian staff writer, December 10, 2002, 10:54:45 PM

Tejon Ranch Co. hopes to get permission Thursday to almost quadruple its industrial and commercial development along Interstate 5.

Two years ago ranch officials got permission to build 4 million square feet of distribution warehouses, gas stations and fast-food stores. They've built about half the facilities so far.

But now the company wants approval to build an additional 15.1 million square feet.

County planning commissioners will consider the project at 7 p.m. Thursday.

If approved, the expansion would be the second phase of the Tejon Industrial Complex, a project aimed at converting the Interstate 5 corridor in southern Kern County into a hot spot for freeway travelers and regional distribution warehouses.

The company kicked off the first phase of the project in 2000 when it got approval to convert 350 acres of land on the west side of I-5. The corporation has found tenants for two large buildings, including a 1.8 million-square-foot IKEA warehouse.

That phase was supposed to take five years to build out, according to Joe Drew, the company's vice president of commercial and industrial development. But demand for distribution warehouse space has pushed that date up, Drew added.

"The market has really accelerated," he said. "We need to be ready to take advantage of the new opportunities."

So now the corporation has turned east for the second phase, which would convert 1,110 acres of mostly farmland into large warehouses, ranging in size from 77,000 square feet to massive 1.8 million-square-foot facilities. The project also includes 92 acres of commercial land, suitable for more gas stations, fast-food establishments or other businesses.

The development could bring in up to 4,300 jobs, according to the company.

To handle all of those new people, Tejon Ranch is expected to build a wastewater treatment plant capable of handling at least 100,000 gallons per day.

Plans also call for a sheriff's substation and fire station in the area, built by the company. Tejon Ranch also would supply a new \$350,000 fire engine.

New fire engine or not, environmentalists warn the project will be a blight on the surrounding wildlife.

Center for Biological Diversity biologist Monica Bond said the development could dislocate local kit foxes, antelope squirrels and burrowing owls. Animals also use the land to move across the valley or between several mountain ranges, Bond added.

"(Tejon Ranch officials) have portrayed this as a wasteland, but it's not," she said. "It is an ecological treasure house."

Environmental groups have also expressed concern about the company's long-term plans for its property. Tejon Ranch encompasses 270,000 acres of land in Kern and Los Angeles counties, used traditionally for ranching and agriculture.

In recent years, however, the company has started developing its land. In addition to the industrial project, the company has plans for a 23,000-acre home residential project near Gorman and a golf course resort.

Environmentalists say they fear the site could be developed in a hodgepodge fashion and have called for a master plan, spelling out how the land would be developed over time.

Local Sierra Club member Ches Arthur says his Pine Mountain-area chapter of the club hasn't gone that far, but would like some more information on the company's grand design.

"We're not saying they are up to no good," he said. "We just wish they were a little more open."

Drew said it would be unfair -- and impossible -- for the company to plan out the future of the entire site, which is equivalent to the size of Los Angeles.

"Nobody would expect all development in the city of Los Angeles to wait until someone could plan out how the entire city will grow," Drew said.

Lodi approves plant's environmental report

By Jeff Hood, Lodi Bureau Chief, The Record, December 11, 2002

LODI -- Plans to build a 49-megawatt power plant in east Lodi are moving ahead after the City Council unanimously approved Tuesday an abbreviated environmental study that showed the generator would have few environmental impacts.

CalPeak Power, which has five other "peaker" plants in California that operate when demand for electricity is highest, plans to build the generator by June 1 to meet its obligations under a contract with the state Department of Water Resources.

The power project consists of a three-mile pipeline leading from Acampo to the plant and the plant itself -- essentially, two modified jet engines running on natural gas with an oversized catalytic converter to clean exhaust.

Ron Watkins, president of CalPeak, said the plant's emissions and noise will barely have an effect on its Thurman Road neighbors, as the environmental report indicated.

Not only will electricity go into the state's power grid, but Lodi also will be able to tap into the supply as well. After nine years, Lodi will have an opportunity to purchase the plant from CalPeak Power.

If that deal happens, Lodi's utility will be able to produce nearly all the city's electricity needs from the new plant and its generator across Turner Road from General Mills, utility director Alan Vallow said.

Tuesday's unusual 7 a.m. public hearing was necessary, Vallow said, because any more delays might jeopardize CalPeak's ability to produce electricity by June 1.

As it turns out, not only was the special meeting, scheduled last week by city staffers, at an unusual time, it also appeared to conflict with Lodi's municipal ordinance. Under it, only the mayor or three council members are allowed to call for a meeting.

Mayor Susan Hitchcock said she originally decided to cancel the meeting but reversed her decisions after CalPeak representatives, including President Ron Watkins, flew from Connecticut for Tuesday's hearing.

No one from the public spoke against the project.

The stars came out to help others breathe easier

By Peter Robertson, Special to the Fresno Bee, December 10, 2002

Seven 12-person teams raised thousands of dollars Thursday at the American Lung Association of Central California's 18th annual Celebrity Waiters' Holiday Luncheon at the Fresno Convention Center.

Mike Alexander from Kaiser Permanente was the honorary chairman and Beth Marney from KFSN, Channel 30, reprised her role as headwaiter of the event, coordinated by Beth Kelvington.

The teams were organized by Rene Bernard from Genesis Inc. (a social agency), Tom Boland from KFSN, Charlee Simons from Alice 102.7 (radio), Mark Thompson from Fresno Madera Farm Credit, Natalie Lloyd of Community Medical Centers, Cal Crane from Kaiser Permanente and Larry Renner from Saint Agnes Medical Center.

Celebrity waiters included Kimberlee Autry, the wife of Fresno Mayor Alan Autry; Fresno City Council member-elect Henry T. Perea; and Kopi Sotiropulos, the KMPH, Channel 26, weatherman.

The silent auction featured original artwork by U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein and autographed bottles of wine from state Rep. George Radanovich. **There also were gift baskets from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District**, the Fresno State Alumni Association, Imagine Inner Beauty day spa and Quady Winery.

Attracting heavy bidding was an autographed jersey from the 2002 Fresno Falcons, this year's Taylor Cup champions.

Prior to the luncheon, Wild Thing, the Fresno Grizzlies mascot, posed for photos. So did Elvis Presley impersonator Jeremy Pearce, who also sang carols and gave away autographed scarves.

Adams Holland and Tim Woods from Echo Restaurant sold samples of their blue-cheese-and-pistachio spread, as well as their goat-cheese-and-Greek-olive spread, with proceeds benefiting the American Lung Association.

Jim Pardini and Pardini's Catering prepared and served a green salad, chicken brochettes with a Dijon mustard cream sauce, and berry cobbler with fresh cream.

The Central California Chapter of the national association, founded in 1918, serves people in Fresno, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced and Tulare county with such lung-affecting ailments as

asthma, cancer, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, tobacco addiction, bronchitis and pneumonia. **It also is a major advocate of better air quality.**

Following the luncheon, chapter executive director Charles Sant'Agata's thanks included a report that nearly two-thirds of children and 11% of adults in Fresno County are diagnosed with asthma. So the next big event for the organization will be the Blow the Whistle on Asthma Walk, May 17. For more info, call Julianne Dittman, 222-4800.

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, December 11, 2002](#)

Stop that smoking

The valley leads the nation in environmentally related lung disease. A major contributor to asthma, bronchitis and the poor health of our lungs is the production of particulate pollution from household wood-burning fireplaces.

Burning wood is not just a personal matter because the exhaust smoke is inhaled by neighbors and other community members. We all have only one air to breathe. This is the same problem as fuel emissions from vehicles and second-hand smoke from cigarettes. Like vehicle exhaust and tobacco smoke, fireplace smoke is unhealthy and does not belong in our lungs. It causes asthma and bronchitis.

Our valley is surrounded by four walls of mountains, and emissions into the air stay here. We have a special environmental situation here and the time has come to ban residential wood-burning fireplaces.

You will still be able to have fireplaces in 2003. It's just that we will have SmogCheck 3!

FRANK HALL