

Visalia's Kawneer plant runs on light

By Michael Miyamoto, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, Sept. 20, 2007

Kawneer Company Inc. has gone green. Since Aug. 17, Kawneer's 200,000-square-foot building in the Visalia Industrial Park has been meeting most or all of its electricity needs through a massive solar-power system.

The company, which has 207 employees, manufactures aluminum doors, frames, storefronts and curtain walls, mainly for commercial buildings.

It has been in business at 7200 Doe Ave. since 1970.

"[The solar project] is a statement by our company that this is the right thing to do from an environmental standpoint," said Norris McElroy, general manager of Kawneer's western region.

The solar-power system involves more than 4,300 flexible, energy-generating strips rather than conventional solar panels. The strips - known as photovoltaic laminates - cover the roof of the sprawling manufacturing plant.

Alcoa Inc., Kawneer's parent company, buys the electricity produced at a discounted rate under a 20-year agreement.

Citing a confidentiality agreement, McElroy declined to say how much the system cost or how much Kawneer is saving. He did say the venture was well worth the effort.

"It's not half [the old electricity bill], I can tell you that," he said. "But it is a significant savings."

Kawneer's solar system is especially meaningful in this age of environmental awareness, McElroy said.

"As a society, we need to figure out ways of having alternative energy," he said.

The Kawneer solar panels provide 500,000 watts of electricity, or nearly 100 percent of the building's electricity needs, according to a statement from Alcoa.

It took about six months to complete the installation and bring it on line.

"This shows our commitment toward sustainability," McElroy said. "It's one of the ways we can get electricity from other than traditional sources."

Kawneer has other manufacturing facilities throughout North America and Europe. While the Visalia plant is the first of those to go solar, others may follow suit. McElroy said it's possible that the Torrance facility will be the next to go solar.

Wal-Mart plan raises noise concerns

By MICHELLE HATFIELD

Modesto Bee, Thursday, September 20, 2007

CERES -- About 20 people showed up to the first of two "scoping meetings" Wednesday on the proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter.

Community members and representatives of agencies such as the Regional Water Quality Control Board attended. Three people spoke on the proposal, expressing concern that the project would bring noise and blight.

The 314,000-square-foot Mitchell Ranch retail center plans include a Wal-Mart Supercenter. The review and comment period for the initial environmental report runs through Oct. 5.

The 44-page initial study includes detailed plans and maps of Mitchell Ranch. The report will analyze of how the shopping center would affect 15 environmental factors, including aesthetics, public services, noise, traffic and air quality, according to the document.

The project is proposed at the northwest corner of Service and Mitchell roads in south Ceres. Plans call for restaurants and retail stores anchored by a 208,000-square-foot Wal-Mart Supercenter.

Wal-Mart has a regular store at 1670 Mitchell Road. Supercenters are larger and sell more groceries, including meats, fruits and vegetables.

While city officials are looking at the center to provide much-needed sales-tax revenue, some residents don't like the idea of locally owned businesses competing with two Wal-Marts.

Winds whip up heavy dust in Manteca

Dennis Wyatt - Managing Editor

Manteca Bulletin, Thursday, September 20, 2007

It wasn't quite a reenactment of the Dust Bowl that prompted the Joad Family in "The Grapes of Wrath" to flee Oklahoma to the San Joaquin Valley at the height of the Depression, but Wednesday's wind-whipped dust storm was irritating to a number of Manteca residents.

Sandy loam dust from agricultural lands and barren fields at one point reduced visibility to about a mile on segments of Airport Way. It wasn't helped at all by construction work going on at Florsheim Homes south of the Highway 120 Bypass and west of Airport Way.

But when the wind hit 15 mph, the automatic system alerting developers that they must start dust control measures that the City Council put in place in 1999 kicked in.

Wednesday's dust problem, however, couldn't be blamed primarily on construction.

"We're down to about zero percent construction," said Manteca Senior Construction Inspector George Ground of major earth moving ventures.

The city did receive complaints about Paseo West dust northwest of Atherton Drive and Woodward Avenue. Ground said developers responded by moving out water trucks.

Gusts up to 22 mph were recorded in the afternoon Wednesday. Much of it was stirring up dust on agricultural fields such as the two straddling Daniels Street east of Airport Way. There is nothing the city can do to regulate dust control on agricultural properties even though eventually they will be developed into shopping centers at that location.

"In fairness to the developers, they have done a good job with dust control," said Ground. "The council has been aggressive but the program (due to the nature of) storms is reactive."

Back in 1999 when there were four major developments going in along the Airport Way corridor, a windy day like Wednesday triggered major dust problems. Ground recalled the building boom was so strong that four developers at the same time cleared all of their land for building houses. The loss of vegetation on unprotected land made it ripe for dust.

There were several times during the spring and summer of 1999 when visibility on Union Road and Airport Way dropped to less than 100 feet in mid-afternoon due to thick dust clouds.

The skies in 1999 would darken even though dusk was still four to five hours away.

It was so bad that when a special meeting was called two months into the windy season more than 120 residents packed the council chambers for over two hours recounting the daily horror of living with a modern-day version of the 1930s' Dust Bowl.

The 1999 dust storms:

- caked many swimming pools with up to 6 inches of mud on the bottom.
- deposited dirt that accelerated the break-down of shake shingles on roofs.
- triggered an epidemic of children suffering from allergies, bloody noses and other maladies.

- forced the cancellation of recesses during the school year at Stella Brockman and Brock Elliott schools when the blowing dirt kicks up.
- destroyed landscaping, including specialty collector trees valued at over \$900 apiece.
- created excess wear and tear on homes that resulted in one owner being told by an appraiser the home has lost "thousands of dollars in value."
- destroyed pool cleaning equipment.
- rendered many pools useless for swimming.
- accelerated damaged exterior paint due to repeated high pressure hosing many home owners have resorted to in a bid to clean the air they breathe.
- caked the inside of homes with dirt to the point several speakers spoke of food tasting like dirt when storms hit during the dinner hour.
- prompted many parents to prevent their children from playing outside.

Ground noted Manteca has come a long ways since 1999 but never the less aggressively pushes for dust control when winds kick up.

He noted it is difficult to predict the need for dust control until high winds hit.

Schwarzenegger embraces role as global-warming statesman Governor, not president, seen as head of U.S. fight

By Michael Gardner, Copley News Service

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Thursday, Sept. 20, 2007

SACRAMENTO - When the U.N. secretary-general extended an off-the-cuff invitation to participate in a global-warming conference in New York City, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger didn't hesitate.

"Of course. I feel honored. Thank you," Schwarzenegger answered without pause as he and Ban Ki-moon wrapped up a July tour of a San Jose company researching ways to limit greenhouse gases.

In contrast, President Bush has withstood growing international pressure to become more aggressive in setting a national agenda to curb global warming.

The world will be reminded of the stark difference between the two Republicans when Bush and Schwarzenegger take separate stages next week.

On Monday, Schwarzenegger will be at the United Nations to promote California's landmark law to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and urge all nations to answer what he considers one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century.

Schwarzenegger "has become the de facto president on the world stage because President Bush has been so absent," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, a national advocacy group.

Bush, meanwhile, has invited leading nations to Washington Sept. 27 and Sept. 28 to begin drafting a long-term, largely voluntary program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with an eye on the effects on industry. His goal is to produce a framework by the end of next year that would guide international policy after 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol expires.

"We are at the point of renewal of the climate-change agenda," said James Connaughton, chairman of the president's Council on Environmental Quality.

Internationally, global warming is being blamed for drought-induced famines, a shrinking polar ice cap and killer heat waves. In California, Schwarzenegger has warned of drawn-out dry spells, forests turned into tinderboxes and damaging floods from early snow melt. Most scientists say

greenhouse gas emissions - mostly from cars, refineries and industry - are a major contributor to global warming.

Since taking office, Schwarzenegger has been a dominant force driving U.S. attitudes toward global warming.

"While the Bush administration doesn't have a great record on climate change, we are very impressed with what the governor of California is doing," said Gregory Barker, a member of the British Parliament since 2001.

"Governor Schwarzenegger has not been talking. He's been doing," said Barker, the Conservative Party's voice on environmental affairs.

John Bruton, the European Union's ambassador to the United States, said his member countries look to California and its governor for leadership.

"When Europeans think of innovation, they think of California," said Bruton, the former prime minister of Ireland. "If California says the problem of climate change is real, we have a sense California knows what it's talking about."

Many Europeans are skeptical of Bush's commitment, particularly since he has failed to endorse Kyoto's goals to curb global warming.

"It is no secret that across Europe, that has been a great disappointment," Barker said. "Without America involved, there can be no solution to climate change."

Schwarzenegger also has openly criticized the president on the issue.

Through Linda Adams, the governor's top environmental adviser, Schwarzenegger gave the president a no-confidence vote on the eve of the two global warming meetings.

"We're assuming there will need to be a new president before we're afforded meaningful action," said Adams, a Democrat.

Schwarzenegger has threatened to take the Bush administration to court over California's right to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles. He maneuvered around the president to craft such agreements between states and has met independently with world leaders in Canada, France and England.

He also secured a commitment from some Republican governors as well as the mayor of New York to participate in reduction programs.

All of this does not come without cost - financial and political. Schwarzenegger has been criticized for promoting industry-friendly incentives over tighter regulations and for spending tax dollars on globe-trotting.

Some consumer watchdogs also criticized Adams and others for taking a spring trip to Europe financed by the California Climate Action Registry, which receives funding from regulated industries. Some business leaders also joined the trip, giving them access to decision-makers.

"Big-business opponents of greenhouse gas reductions bought high-quality face time," said Carmen Balber of the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights.

Nevertheless, some prominent Democrats don't fault Schwarzenegger's trips.

"The governor has to go because Bush isn't doing his job," said state Attorney General Jerry Brown, a former governor. "As the leader of California, he's a very visible national figure. People pay attention to him."

Brown did say he was encouraged by the president's call for a summit on the issue.

"It's significant George Bush is now using the word 'global warming' and talking about it as a serious threat and promising to do something," Brown said. "It's a fundamental shift of position."

Joel Schwartz, an analyst at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, said politicians and the public need to keep in mind that reducing greenhouse gas emissions could force higher energy prices and squeeze supplies.

"No matter where you are, people are going to have a tough time giving that up," Schwartz said.

Schwartz is skeptical of the dire warnings. "Climate change is not a crisis," he said. "The thing we should be most afraid of is rushing to foolish policy."

The president's platform includes working with big emitters such as China and India. He also wants to curb rampant deforestation because trees take carbon dioxide, one of the main greenhouse gases, out of the air. And he wants to strike technology-sharing deals.

Bush believes more can be accomplished through voluntary programs that offer incentives. He also wants to see more progress from India and China before inflicting the pain of mandatory emission controls on U.S. companies.

Initially a global warming skeptic, Bush said in a recent letter to world leaders that "science has deepened our understanding of climate change and opened new possibilities for confronting it."

The president added that he wants "special emphasis on how major economies can, in close cooperation with the private sector, accelerate the development and deployment of clean technologies."

European leaders say they are looking to Bush to provide a clear signal of U.S. direction.

"Business needs certainty about the regulatory regime," said Bruton, the European Union ambassador.

Barker, the member of Britain's Parliament, said the United States can no longer avoid tough choices.

"It's not a question of pass or pay," he said. "You have to play this one."

States join California struggle with EPA

Environmentalists say they'll sue if agency doesn't let states curb emissions

By John Dodge, McClatchy Newspapers

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, September 20, 2007

OLYMPIA, Wash. -- Several Washington state environmental groups began legal action against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for delaying state legislation to curb auto emissions that contribute to global warming.

The groups joined environmentalists in Oregon and California -- two other states with stymied clean air, clean car laws -- in calling on the EPA to issue the necessary waiver to allow the laws to go into effect in 2009 or face a lawsuit.

The state legislation is designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 30 percent by 2016. In Washington state, transportation sources account for about 50 percent of the state's global warming pollution.

California has been seeking the EPA waiver for two years. Twelve other states have similar laws that assert the states' authority under the Clean Air Act to restrict greenhouse gas auto emissions.

The auto industry has challenged that assertion by the states, saying the air emission standards are mileage standards that are the purview of the federal government. But a federal judge in Vermont last week ruled that the state auto emission rules are not pre-empted by other federal laws.

"So far, the federal government has refused to allow Washington to implement our new Clean Cars law to improve water quality and reduce global warming pollution," said Becky Kelley, climate change director of the Washington Environmental Council. "That's not right, and that's

why we are taking action today." Other environmental groups based in Washington joining in the notice of intent to sue the EPA are Climate Solutions, the Northwest Energy Coalition and Environment Washington.

EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson has promised a decision by the end of the year on whether to grant the waiver.

The new standards would require automakers to use more efficient transmissions and air conditioners and smaller engines, boosting the cost of an average vehicle about \$1,000, according to 2005 estimates when the clean car bill passed into law.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Thursday, September 20, 2007:](#)

Senate Bill 451 should go into the bio-digester

Used to be there were only a couple of ways to make money from a cow. You could sell its milk, or you could sell the cow.

Now, dairy farmers can make money off cowpies. For a region with tens of thousands of cows, and thousands of people who dutifully tend them, this is important. Cow manure creates a gas called methane, just like the stuff in natural gas that is burned to create electricity.

Having found new money, a multitude of hands are reaching for it -- even though it's buried in a cowpie. Senate Bill 451 is awaiting the governor's signature; it would transfer most of the farmers' possible new income to big utility companies. That's not fair.

When manure is left in a lagoon, it releases methane into the air, where it is 21 times more harmful than a car's tailpipe emissions. But manure put into a bio-digester keeps the methane out of the air and instead pipes it into a generator. Methane from cow manure is renewable and reduces the amount of carbon-emitting fossil fuels needed to produce electricity.

But a bio-digester for a medium-sized dairy can cost a half million dollars, and they're expensive to maintain. Such investments must be justified. The few farmers now capturing methane use most of it in their own generators -- reducing the amount of electricity they buy. What's left, they can send to their utility company for credit against their power bills. That's called "net metering," a program that caps the amount of electricity that can be generated through a farm's methane.

This alone wouldn't justify the huge investment. But nationwide, those who produce fossil-fuel alternatives are getting carbon credits. These can be sold for around \$3 each to companies that need to offset bad environmental behavior. Joseph Gallo Farms, which has one of the industry's largest bio-digesters, generates about 25,000 carbon credits per year from just a portion of its operation.

There's more. Since methane is renewable, farmers also get a renewable energy credit. These have little value now, but as companies are required to use more renewable energy, these credits will become valuable.

That's why utility companies want them.

SB451 would raise the cap on how much methane generation could be sold to utilities and it would require the utilities to buy the extra power -- an attractive incentive for farmers. But to make it attractive to the utility companies, SB451 would turn over all of a farmer's renewable energy credits to them.

Worse, SB451 makes the farmer's initial decision permanent. If the renewable energy credits become twice as valuable as the gas itself, tough luck -- they belong to the utility company.

Considering all the positives in creating electricity out of waste, government should do all it can to encourage farmers. It shouldn't be forcing them to make an irrevocable decision about their future.

If the governor rejects this bill, it likely will come back next year -- hopefully much improved. The governor should reject this bill and wait for something better.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, September 20, 2007](#)

Require converters to burn wood

I would like to make a suggestion that would improve our air quality significantly. The quality of the air here in our valley is having a negative effect on all our health.

We should ban all wood-burning fireplaces and stoves without catalytic converters. The system of burn and no-burn does little to slow these prolific polluters. There is no incentive for people to move toward control of the emission they cause.

There will be opposition to this necessary move, just as there was when smoking was outlawed in restaurants. That move made eating out more healthy and pleasant. The fireplace rules will have a much wider beneficial result for more of us in this wonderful valley.

For less coughing and hacking,

Winterfred T. Hill - Riverbank

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, September 20, 2007](#)

Letter to the editor: Support Senate Bill 719

Editor: Senate Bill 719 needs our support. After all, improving the air we breathe here in the Valley is vital to our well-being, and critical to the 36,000 Merced County residents who have been diagnosed with asthma.

This bill would add more members, including two doctors to our local air pollution control board. We need all the help we can get to restore clean air to the Valley.

However, opposition to this common sense change comes from our District 3 supervisor. What in the world was Supervisor Mike Nelson thinking when he said, "I think it's a solution in search of a problem. I don't think adding more people to the board will clean up the air."

The problem, Mr. Nelson, is we live in one of the worst air basins in the United States, and Merced ranks sixth in the nation for ozone pollution. You of all people should know this. As member of the board, it is your responsibility.

Please put politics aside and support adding two physicians with pulmonary expertise to the air pollution control board -- and 246,000 pairs of county residents' lungs will thank you for it.

Fred Warchol - Atwater

[Tri-Valley Herald Editorial Wednesday, September 20, 2007:](#)

California should vacate suit against automakers

U.S. District Judge Martin Jenkins reached a sensible - and correct - conclusion Monday when he dismissed California's bid to force the Big Six automakers to pay for whatever contributions their products have made to the consequences of global warming.

Attorney General Jerry Browns office is pondering whether to appeal the ruling. We urge it not to do so for myriad reasons.

Whom do we sue next if such suits continue: Utilities, including publicly owned energy providers? Truckers, their manufacturers and the oil industry? Ships and airplanes? Coal companies? Manufacturers of various products? Farmers? The list could be long, almost endless.

It also points out one of the suits central problems: How do you determine which entities contribute to global warming, in what proportion and how to assess them for damages? There is no barometer.

The state argued that carmakers have created a public nuisance and harmed such natural resources as land, air, water, soil, trees and the habitat of various species, thereby creating problems that could get worse - and expensive.

Lest we forget, however, technological and transportation improvements of all sorts in the past century powered the development of a highly mobile society that gave mankind access to a wide variety of technological improvements, products, resources, experiences and parts of the world heretofore inaccessible to most of us. It can be argued that they've been a means of improving human life here and elsewhere. While were facing problems derived from such progress, do we want to reverse or abandon those trends and life improvements?

And, as we go about addressing such problems, shouldn't we do so as communities, states, nations and societies working in concert with one another?

In his ruling, Jenkins noted that there are multiple worldwide sources of atmospheric warming across myriad industries and multiple countries. He also said addressing such multifaceted challenges belongs to the political - legislative and executive - branches of government, which commonly deal with environmental issues, establish policies, regulate problems and deal with other nations in addressing them. At present, he said, courts are ill-equipped to enter the global warming thicket. Work needs to be done at the legislative level to make such issues more accessible for the judiciary.

The suit was initiated last year by former Attorney General Bill Lockyer while he was seeking election to his present post, state treasurer. Brown, a former governor and Oakland mayor, was elected to Lockyers old post and since has involved himself in environmental and global warming issues.

We encourage innovative approaches to global warming and climate change - and California has taken the lead in those initiatives because of the federal governments sloth-like reaction. But this suit is wrongheaded and should be abandoned.