

Air study measures livestock pollution

By Rick Callahan

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, July 13, 2007

Scientists at eight universities are conducting the largest-ever study of air emissions at the nation's hog, dairy and poultry farms.

The study, which scientists hope will help improve methods of estimating any given farm's emissions, began this summer and will take an estimated 2 1/2 years to complete. It will measure levels of hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, nitrous oxide, particulate matter and other substances wafting from livestock buildings and manure lagoons at 20 farms in nine states.

Al Heber, a Purdue professor of agricultural and biological engineering who's leading the \$14.6 million study, said it will collect two continuous years of emissions data at each site.

Sensors will collect real-time data that are expected to help the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency devise science-based guidelines for livestock air emissions, which the agency regulates. Results are expected by the end of 2009, followed by a peer-review process.

"The bottom line is we're going to get just a ton of data and I think people all over the country are expecting that - regulators, livestock producers, everybody knows we're going to get a lot of good data," he said.

The study is required under a 2005 compliance agreement between the Environmental Protection Agency and the livestock industry. Although the agency is supervising the project, it's being financed by money livestock producers agreed to pay into a research fund under the agreement.

To date, more than 2,600 agreements have been signed with livestock companies that operate about 14,000 swine, dairy, egg-layer and broiler chicken farms in 42 states, said Jon Scholl, EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson's agriculture adviser.

A 2002 report by the National Academy of Sciences called on the EPA to improve its methods for estimating emissions from big livestock farms - research that will help determine if farms are complying with the Clean Air Act.

"We found that we really don't have the level of scientific information and data that's needed to make some sound policy calls in this area," Scholl said.

He said it's unclear whether the study's findings will have any impact on federal or state-level environmental regulations. The participating farms are in California, Indiana, Iowa, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

One of the farms is a 20,000-head hog farm about 50 miles northwest of Indianapolis in Carroll County owned by Marion Huffer and his relatives. Huffer said his farm was chosen in part because it's only about 30 miles from the main campus at Purdue, which is leading the study.

"We're hog farmers and we try to abide by all of the laws and be a good neighbor, so we just wanted to help out. It's good for us and it's good for the industry," he said.

But some environmental groups aren't convinced that the study will produce useful results.

The Washington-based Environmental Integrity Project is one of six environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, that's sued the EPA and livestock groups over their compliance agreement, contending that it essentially exempts livestock farms from the Clean Air Act.

Karla Raettig, a lawyer for the group, questions whether the study's sample size - 20 farms out of the 14,000 that have signed onto the compliance agreement - is too small to produce results that will reflect typical emissions from the nation's livestock farms.

"We're concerned that the sample size is awfully small - too small to yield data for what the EPA says they want it for," she said. "Without a bigger sample, we're very concerned that the data is not going to be reliable."

Heber said the 20-farm study is big enough to produce good science.

"We'd always like more, but this is going to get us a lot closer to the truth than what we have right now," he said. "It's a huge step forward scientifically for understanding farm emissions."

Funds aim at cleaner spraying

Federal government will pay growers to up the precision in pesticide application.

By Dennis Pollock / The Fresno Bee

Friday, July 13, 2007

Machinery that can zap weeds and apply pesticides more efficiently is at the center of a plan unveiled Thursday to help farmers do their part for clean air.

The federal government will spend nearly half a million dollars over the next three years to make use of precision spray equipment available to more farmers.

"This should help to keep agriculture competitive and productive while ... providing environmental benefits," said Mark Rey, U.S. Department of Agriculture deputy undersecretary for natural resources and the environment.

Not keeping agriculture competitive could bring urbanization and still more threats to air quality, Rey said. He also said that the USDA hopes for continued funding for the initiatives.

His announcement came at the offices of the Nisei Farmers League in Fresno.

"Thanks for those dollars," said Manuel Cunha Jr., who heads the league. "We'll take them all the way."

Others also welcomed the assistance. The central San Joaquin Valley is known for poor air quality.

"We know that there is no silver bullet to clean up the air," said Pete Weber, co-chairman of the Regional Jobs Initiative in Fresno and a member of the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley.

"But this is a beautiful example of a convergence between economic benefits and environmental benefits."

The goal is to reduce emissions from pesticides and herbicides, which are a source of volatile organic compounds, a precursor to ozone formation.

The state's Department of Pesticide Regulation and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will require growers to reduce such emissions by late 2007.

With federal assistance of \$150,000 per year, project leaders plan to target four or five major growers who could use the machinery.

Growers who enroll would share half the costs.

Rey said the conservation service will reach out to minority farmers and provide services to farmers who pool their efforts. Those organizations include Southeast Asians for Clean Air, African-American Farmers of California and National Hmong-American Farmers.

Loxing Kiatoukaysi said the outreach comes at a good time.

His organization is seeking to form a cooperative of about 30 growers and secure chemical-application licensing for a few of them.

The proposal combines technical and cost-share assistance through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, which will oversee the initiative through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Machinery that can pinpoint just where and when to spray has been around for years.

Reedley machinery dealer Sam Judah, who was at the event, said he sells similar equipment that has been around nearly two decades, and the federal government helped foster its use.

The claim emphasized Thursday is that the equipment saves farmers money.

"In young orchards, a grower may reduce sprays by 40% to 50%," said John Beyer, California air quality coordinator with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"In more mature orchards, the savings may be 10% to 15%."

In addition to orchards and vineyards, the precision sprayers can be used on row crops, such as vegetables.

"There's a real need for this, and it has a real value," said Gabrielle Kirkland, director of environmental and regulatory affairs for the California Grape and Tree Fruit League in Fresno.

Explosives meeting next week

Tracy Press, Thursday, July 12, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will meet Wednesday to discuss a new application to increase explosive detonations at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's Site 300.

The informational meeting for area residents will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the Tracy City Council Chambers, 333 Civic Center Plaza.

The lab has filed a new application to increase its outdoor testing blasts from 100 pounds to as much as 350 pounds of explosives at the site per-day, according to district officials.

The application was cancelled in March because the district said it did not have enough data about the proposed increased blast testing. The district determined that more information was needed if an increase was to be allowed.

District officials will explain the permitting process, including requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act. A question-and-answer session will follow.

For information: 557-6400.

EXPLOSIONS SUBJECT OF HEARING

Modesto Bee, Thursday, July 12, 2007

Air quality officials will hold a information session at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday on Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's application to increase explosions at Site 300 near Tracy. The lab wants to detonate as much as 350 pounds of explosives per day. The air district initially decided to allow the explosions but rescinded the decision in March after learning that the explosives contained radioactive material. Lab officials maintain that the material is not usually considered radioactive "because its radioactivity level is so low as to be equal to or below background level." The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is holding the meeting to explain the permitting process, application status and most opportune time for public comment. The meeting will be in the Tracy City Council chamber, 333 Civic Center Plaza. For information, call the district at 557-6400.

EPA head defends new smog proposal

By ERICA WERNER - Associated Press Writer

Sacramento Bee and Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, July 11, 2007

WASHINGTON -- The government's top environmental regulator defended the Bush administration's proposal for new limits on smog against Democratic charges that it's too weak and Republican complaints that it goes too far.

Neither criticism pushed Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen L. Johnson off his talking points Wednesday in an appearance before a Senate environmental panel.

"I concluded the current standard does not protect public health with an adequate margin of safety and should be strengthened," he testified repeatedly, saying that "I will be basing my decision on the science."

At issue was the EPA's recommendation, released last month, for the first new limits since 1997 on ground-level ozone - the combination of car exhaust, industrial emissions and gasoline vapors aggravated by summertime sun and heat and more commonly known as smog.

Smog is blamed for health risks for children, old people, and those suffering from asthma and other lung ailments.

EPA measures smog by calculating the concentration of ozone molecules in the atmosphere over an eight-hour period. The current standard is .084 parts per million. EPA is proposing reducing that to between .070 and .075 parts per million.

The agency will settle on a final figure by next March 12. The agency will accept public comments on the proposal for the next 90 days. EPA also is soliciting comments on alternate standards, including keeping the current one. That has sparked loud criticism from Democrats and environmentalists who attribute it to industry lobbying.

"Why do you hold the door open to .08 in your rule? Explain that. I don't understand it," asked Sen. Barbara Boxer, who chairs the Senate environmental panel.

Johnson started to say that he'd heard from members of the public who wanted to keep the current level.

Boxer, a California Democrat, interrupted to demand to know who those people were.

"Typically it was members of industry, and typically members of the public health community told me that I needed to lower the standard," Johnson replied.

Boxer asked him if he was aware of a meeting last month among various industry groups and White House officials on the smog rule.

"I just want to make sure that they didn't do an end-run and somehow influence your people," Boxer said.

Johnson said he wasn't aware of the meeting and would have to get back to her.

Public documents on file with EPA, and released Wednesday by the group Environmental Defense, show that the White House Office of Management and Budget submitted language to EPA just before the smog proposal was released suggesting that changing the current standard without more research could "have an uncertain public health payoff." The OMB language was included nearly verbatim in EPA's proposal among the concerns the agency had heard.

Republican senators cautioned Johnson that tightening the smog rule would pose grave economic costs to communities that would ultimately be passed on to consumers.

Many areas still aren't in compliance with the existing smog levels. States face loss of federal highway funds if they don't come up with compliance plans, but doing so is a yearslong process.

"The fact is this proposal is rife with political considerations with little thought given to the people who would be forced to endure its consequences," said Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla.

Power plant location weighed Energy Commission presents findings to Calpine Corp.

By Rachel Cohen, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, July 12, 2007

HAYWARD - The California Energy Commission and Cal-pine Corp. staff and consultants faced off in a work session Wednesday evening over a commission assessment of the proposed Russell City Energy Center.

The commission made suggestions to a report that addressed changes from a request to move the plant to a site between Depot Road and Enterprise Avenue, about 1,300 feet from the original site. A half-dozen Calpine Corp. employees and consultants responded to requests for changes from the Energy Commission in the Staff Assessment - Part 1 and Part 2 Combined Russell City Energy Center Amendment No. 1 report. The teams thumbed through the roughly 200-page report to hear feedback on 20 sections of the engineering and environmental assessments.

Energy Commission project manager Lance Shaw explained that his agency may change its decision if it finds that the project will improve all significant impacts and that it will be beneficial to the public or project owner.

Wednesday was the fourth and final planned workshop. A committee will meet at City Hall next to conduct a prehearing conference on the information at 4 p.m. July 19, followed by an evidentiary hearing at 6 p.m.

Audrey Lepell, the only resident who gave public comment, spoke on behalf of the Hayward Area Shoreline Planning and the Citizens Alternative Transportation Solutions, local planning groups in opposition to the Calpine plant and a second plant proposed by Tierra Energy nearby. "Everything that happens or near the Hayward shoreline affects everyone who lives near here," she said.

Among the engineering matters discussed were talking with Pacific Gas & Electric about their gas transmission line, which will feed the plant.

The bulk of the meeting focused on the environmental impacts. Calpine consultant Barbara McBride talked about lowering the oxides of nitrogen and the precursor organic compound emissions during ozone season in the summer.

When McBride spoke about the Energy Regulatory Commission's credits that can be bought from high polluters, a Hayward resident spoke out in concern over the practice of taking credits from a company that no longer exists.

But the energy commission and Calpine representatives explained that overall the use of credits has improved air quality in the Bay area.

Another Air Quality section addressed the fireplace retrofit and woodstove replacement program, which is voluntary and helps reduce particulate matter or pollution in the air.

David Stark of the Bay East Association of Realtors asked for clearer language and marketing materials explaining the impact on how many properties would be eligible for this and the cost.

In the visual resources section, the attendees discussed the landscaping plan and how the Bay Trail and the Highway 92 bridge users would be shielded from views of the plant.

Documents on the proposed power plant are available at the Hayward public libraries as well as on the energy commission Web site at -
<<http://www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/russellcityamendment/index.html>>.

Ports on track to cleaner air

'Greener' locomotives hailed as milestone

By Donna Littlejohn, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Thursday, July 12, 2007

Hailed as a milestone in the effort to "grow the ports green," two clean-diesel locomotives rolled down dockside tracks for the first time Wednesday in the Port of Long Beach.

"I love these trains," said Long Beach City Councilwoman Tonia Reyes Uranga. "It's hard to say a train is cute, but they're very nice looking."

The celebration included nearly an hour of speeches by local dignitaries, who praised the new locomotives as a model for other companies and ports to follow.

So far, the \$23 million public-private project has delivered the first four clean locomotives for Pacific Harbor Line, with two of the cars unveiled at the Port of Long Beach for the commissioning.

Officials from both the ports and cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach were on hand in a show of solidarity.

Two additional clean-diesel engines, costing \$1.3 million apiece, will arrive each month through the end of the year to serve on the ports' switching lines, tracks that provide service within the twin port complex. Eventually, the entire Pacific Harbor Line fleet will be replaced.

"This will dramatically clean the air in and around these ports," said Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster. "We all know there are health impacts associated with these ports. This is a fantastic start."

Uranga, also a board member of the Southern California Air Quality Management District, thanked the ports and Pacific Harbor Line for stepping up to replace polluting engines, some of which were 50 years old.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you for seizing the opportunity and making this commitment," she said. "I personally want to thank you for helping me breathe easier."

The rail project, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said, is an important jump-start for the Clean Air Action Plan, a sweeping program to dramatically reduce pollution in the ports. Considered vital to the regional, state and national economies, the ports are expected to triple in size over the next 20 years.

"There are some who say just close down the ports, they're a public health risk," Villaraigosa said. "If we were to close down these ports it would kill the Southern California economy."

"The growth is unstoppable," he said, but any future growth must stop the trend of pollution by making use of new technologies and stricter standards.

"This is America's port," Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn said. "Almost half of the goods that come into this country come in through these ports."

While the ports represent the region's "economic engine," Hahn said residents have "been choking on that engine for way too long."

"The technology exists today, we just have to have the political will," she said. Local residents have unfairly had to bear the burden of higher health risks because of the rapidly growing ports, Hahn said.

"There's no doubt these ports will grow," said Long Beach harbor commission President Mario Cordero. "The question for us is how will we grow responsibly?"

The locomotives, outfitted with remanufactured engines, produce 70 percent less diesel exhaust and 46 percent less smog-forming nitrogen oxides. They also cut greenhouse gases by burning 30 percent less fuel.

The project cost is being shared by the company, the ports and the Carl Moyer Fund, a state air quality improvement fund administered by the South Coast AQMD.

Pacific Harbor Line, a private company, has provided rail service to the two ports since 1998, connecting to the BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad lines.

"Industry is not the enemy in this," said Peter Gilbertson, CEO of Anacostia and Pacific Co. and chairman of Pacific Harbor Line. "We are partners in this. We want to be part of the solution."

Now it's time for the other rail companies to follow suit, said S. David Freeman, president of the Los Angeles Board of Harbor Commissioners.

"We're on the march for cleaner air," he said.

Power brokers are at center of push for Vernon electric plant

Former elected officials lobby on behalf of the facility, which is before the AQMD today. Clean-air activists are opposed.

By David Zahniser, Times Staff Writer
Los Angeles Times, Friday, July 13, 2007

Environmental activist Angelo Logan once viewed former state Sen. Martha Escutia as a champion on health issues, someone who sought to reduce the amount of air pollution produced by the trains that roll past the low-income communities southeast of downtown Los Angeles.

But these days, Logan and Escutia are on opposite sides of a clean-air fight, taking part in a furious last-minute lobbying blitz over a \$450-million power plant proposed by the tiny industrial city of Vernon.

Escutia, a Los Angeles attorney, and two other former elected officials who have represented communities near Vernon - former Assemblyman Tom Calderon of Montebello and former Los Angeles City Councilman Richard Alatorre - have been at the center of the power plant campaign, lobbying elected officials in favor of rules that would spur construction of the 914-megawatt facility.

That political firepower indicates just how high the stakes are, not just for Vernon but also for a handful of other power plants in the planning stages across the region. That clout has discouraged the environmental groups who are waging their own fight against the plant.

If they "pick up a phone and they make a call, they can get a lunch with just about anyone. That power doesn't fade away," said Logan, executive director of East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District is scheduled to decide today how much Vernon would have to pay to open its proposed 13.7-acre plant, which could begin operating at the corner of Boyle and Fruitland avenues by the summer of 2009.

Although the Vernon plant still faces an extensive review by the California Energy Commission, the AQMD vote is considered pivotal because it would create a new, highly technical set of rules governing the construction of new power generating facilities. The AQMD board is weighing whether to charge more to power plants that seek to operate in low-income neighborhoods already beset by environmental problems.

One proposal before the agency would require Vernon to pay nearly \$50 million in "mitigation fees," including roughly \$50,000 for each pound of PM10 - tiny particulate matter viewed as a cause of premature deaths - that would be generated by the plant on a daily basis.

An alternative proposal would push the cost as high as \$89.2 million. And a third would require power plants to have cleaner technology when they are built in "environmental justice zones" - including Vernon.

Clean-air advocates contend that the AQMD proposal would open a Pandora's box, setting the stage for as many as eight other new power plants across the region, including facilities being discussed in El Segundo, Carson and Riverside.

"The district's decision will allow more than 35 billion pounds of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, to be emitted each year," said Tim Grabiell, staff attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group that has already sued once over the power plant rules.

Vernon's representatives say that the creation of a cleaner-burning plant will lead to the removal of another dirtier plant elsewhere in the region. They also warn that critics of the power plant are jeopardizing the opportunity for cities in southeast Los Angeles County to secure new clean-air projects.

"The opponents are saying no to \$50 million in mitigation fees," said Hilda Delgado, a consultant for the city.

Vernon's small army of lobbyists, lawyers and consultants also has been submitting stacks of letters and petitions from residents and companies who favor the project. But some of the elected officials remain unconvinced.

"I can understand that they hire big guns and hire lobbyists, but I don't think anybody in the community knows this is going on," Supervisor Gloria Molina said. Molina and an array of environmental groups say the communities that surround Vernon already cope with a disproportionate share of pollution, from the nearby rail yards to the diesel trucks that travel each day on the 710 Freeway.

Backers of the Vernon plant counter that the project would be cleaner than the vast majority of existing power generating facilities. And they argue that the facility would help the region prevent the rolling brownouts and blackouts that have plagued Southern California over the last decade.

"If we don't build this plant, I believe there are going to be times when we have to go into emergency mode," said Santa Ana Mayor Miguel Pulido, an AQMD board member who supports new regulations that would allow more power plants to be built.

Pulido said he has discussed the project with Escutia, Alatorre and yet another onetime politician, former Assemblyman Mike Roos. "They are putting a lot of pressure on the other cities," said Maywood Councilman Felipe Aguirre, an opponent of the Vernon plant who has heard from Escutia and Calderon. "They're calling and asking, 'What do you need from the city of Vernon? What can Vernon do to make this more palatable to you?'"

If built, the plant could prove highly lucrative to Vernon, which plans to sell its surplus power to the grid operated by the state's Independent System Operator. On a much smaller scale, the plant could give the city \$660,000 in new sales tax revenue and create 20 permanent jobs.

Escutia and Calderon did not respond to repeated requests for comment, and Alatorre was out of town and couldn't be reached. Delgado would not say how many lobbyists are working for Vernon or identify who they are.

Long Beach City Councilwoman Tonia Reyes Uranga, who sits on the AQMD board, said she had spoken with Escutia, Alatorre and Calderon at least twice about the power plant rules. AQMD board member and Los Angeles City Councilwoman Jan Perry said she had been contacted by Escutia, Alatorre and lobbyist Victor Griego.

Perry, whose district is 1.5 miles west of the power plant site, said she won't support the project until she has a clearer understanding of the ways that Vernon would make up for the plant's environmental effects.

"The thing that concerns me is the discussion is about how much money cities will get up front, as opposed to, are we protecting the health of the public," she said.

[N.Y. Times editorial, Friday, July 13, 2007:](#)

Sneezing at \$500 Million

It isn't every day that the federal government offers New York half-a-billion dollars in free money, but that is how much seems to be available to establish a congestion-pricing program in Manhattan. The money would help relieve traffic and reduce harmful tailpipe emissions. The catch is that the deadline for applying for the money is early next week, and the state's leaders appear to be about to let it slip away. If they do, the voters should hold them accountable for colossally bad governance.

New York is one of nine cities vying for a chunk of \$1.2 billion in Department of Transportation funds. But while its competitors have gotten their applications in, New York has not. Mayor Michael Bloomberg would have submitted his proposal by now, but he must get approval from Albany first. Bring out the aspirin.

Gov. Eliot Spitzer and Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno seem to have put aside their recent difficulties and have agreed that New York shouldn't miss the Monday deadline. But the

Assembly speaker, Sheldon Silver, is saying that he and his members won't be back before then. We've become used to Mr. Silver maneuvering himself into the pivot position on big issues, but in this case he's ready to squander something vital for the city.

Under Mr. Bloomberg's current proposal, most drivers south of 86th Street during the busiest weekday traffic hours would be charged, \$8 for cars and \$21 for trucks. If it works properly, it should lower air pollution significantly, as it has in London, while the fees would also provide much-needed funds for public transportation. The idea isn't popular in the suburbs and the outer boroughs. Congestion pricing has met opposition wherever it has been proposed, but once it is in place it gains popular support.

The precise details of the program can be ironed out later with Albany's help. But the first order of business now should be for Mr. Silver and his Assembly colleagues to get back to Albany and make sure New York gets its application in for that \$500 million.