

Valley on TV: Series explores common issues

The Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2010

KVPT-Valley Public Television and the Great Valley Center have joined forces for a new public affairs series called "Great Valley, debuting Friday. The program will focus on problems facing the valley and potential solutions, and feature occasional guests from Bakersfield and Kern County.

"The Central Valley's population is expected to double by 2050 and our current problems will only be magnified in the future unless we start planning and devising solutions now," said Stacey Shepard, Great Valley Center's South Valley representative and associate producer of the series. "I encourage anyone who cares about the Central Valley, and what it will look like 50 years from now, to tune into 'Great Valley' and follow the discussion on issues impacting the region and what we can do to change the valley's future for the better."

The series joins KVPT's Friday news and information block, absent a local presence since "Valley Press" aired its last episode nearly 18 months ago when long-time host Jim Tucker retired.

"Every week we hear from our viewers how much they miss having a program that delves into local issues," said KVPT President and CEO Paula Castadio.

Hosting the series will be David Hosley, president of the Great Valley Center, a nonprofit organization that supports activities and organizations benefitting the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Central Valley.

Topics for the series' first season include population growth, health care, land use, care for the environment, education, employment, civic and social engagement, agriculture and the arts. Though wide-ranging, each topic is an issue that cities across the Central Valley are grappling with every day.

"While the economy, for example, is a focus of the national news media, our objective is to offer clarity on how we are affected at the local level - and more importantly what can we do about it," Hoseley said.

Hosley comes to the series with a background in journalism as well as public television. He covered local and regional issues for two decades as a reporter and anchor for radio and television stations in California, New York and Miami.

AT&T, the San Joaquin Valley Air District and the San Joaquin Valley Council of Governments are providing funding for the series.

-- Information compiled from KVPT and Great Valley Center media releases

Kettleman City families hopeful after EPA visit

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010

Twenty-year-old Lizbeth Canales is still grieving the loss of her unborn child. She survived a ruptured appendix during her recent pregnancy. Her baby didn't.

It was last August. She was six months pregnant.

That's also when she made a haunting discovery: Her stillborn baby had a cleft palate and other facial deformities -- a problem that has affected half a dozen mothers within the last two and a half years. Canales' baby's not part of the live-birth statistics but makes the seventh reported case of birth defect babies in Kettleman City since September 2007.

After months of silence, Canales is speaking out in public to share her story along with other mothers, whose lives are also affected by babies born with cleft palates and other deformities.

She was one of the mothers who sat down with Jared Blumenfeld, newly appointed regional director of the EPA's Pacific Southwest division, in a private meeting Wednesday after his tour of the nearby toxic waste facility run by Waste Management.

There has been a lot of heartbreak in the community, but a sense of hope reverberated among Kettleman City residents following an unprecedented visit by a key federal official.

"I think the moms felt that someone was listening to them at last. All of them said they felt really hopeful," said Maricela Mares-Alatorre, a Kettleman resident and community advocate.

It was the day the families of this rural farm community had long awaited.

After nearly two years of pleading for someone to listen to their concerns about an abnormally high number of birth defects, they got one of the biggest ears in the West -- Blumenfeld.

Blumenfeld has promised to determine what his agency has done to analyze whether the problem is linked to the Chemical Waste Management Inc. landfill, which wants to expand.

Bob Henry, manager of the waste facility, maintains the operation on a hill 3.5 miles away from Kettleman is safe and hopes the scrutiny will improve lives in the community.

"We were pleased to welcome Jared Blumenfeld for his first visit to our Kettleman Hills Facility," Henry said in a statement issued after the visit. "We discussed with [him] the many environmental exposures that area residents face each day -- from the more than 5.5 million trucks passing through on I-5 each year to drinking water quality."

Kettleman City, population 1,500, is a crossroads on Interstate 5, California's main north-south artery. Thousands of diesel trucks pass by every day. The town also is bisected by high-tension power lines and surrounded by the farm fields in which many of the residents work. The fields have been sprayed with pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

When the issue was first raised last July by Greenaction, an environmental justice group, some skepticism was expressed about the claim.

Dr. Benjamin Hoffman, chief medical officer for Waste Management told The Sentinel at that time: "I'll make a guess that you'll not find that cluster, that it does not exist. There are some birth defects, but I'm going to bet there's no unifying case."

Still, the mothers want to know what is to blame for the problems if not the landfill full of PCBs and pesticides.

Blumenfeld met privately with families after a private tour of the waste facility. The families said afterward that Blumenfeld spoke generally about the need for better health monitoring. They called it a victory.

Blumenfeld said little about the meetings that his aides had described earlier as a listening session.

"It's an emotional thing to talk about," he said after spending 80 minutes in the home of Maura Alatorre, whose son, Emmanuel, was born two years ago with a cleft palate. "I learned a lot, and, hopefully, they feel better being able to share."

Kettleman City's plight is getting high-profile attention because of Blumenfeld as well as Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has promised that two state agencies would look into the health issue.

But his announcement came only after repeated requests by Kings County officials to look into the issue since last summer. State health officials initially told the county they were reluctant to do a full investigation because they didn't think it would be fruitful.

State Department of Health officials have since scheduled a meeting with Kings County supervisors next Tuesday and with Kettleman residents that evening to present updated birth defect data and discuss next steps in their investigation.

The birth defects became a rallying point last year for residents trying to stop the expansion plans of the waste facility. Kings County finds itself in an odd position after being sued for approving the project while playing a role in convincing the state to investigate Kettleman's plight.

Meanwhile, residents want a moratorium on all proposed polluting projects near Kettleman, such as the landfill expansion and the Avenal power plant, Mares-Alatorre said.

"We don't know what's causing the birth defects, but we do know the environmental factors can cause them. So it seems irresponsible to add more pollution when the study is not even done," she said.

Magdalena Romero, whose baby was born with birth defects and later died, hopes that Blumenfeld's visit marks a turning point in their fight.

"I am very happy we were promised there would be a thorough investigation, and that Mr. Blumenfeld would be available to us and he would be there to help us anyway he can," Romero said.

Southland panel rejects funds for ethanol fueling stations

Members of the Southern California Assn. of Governments reject \$11 million in federal stimulus money to set up 55 stations throughout the Southland. They say ethanol causes environmental problems.

By Catherine Saillant

L.A. Times, Friday, Feb. 5, 2010

A regional panel Thursday turned down nearly \$11 million in federal stimulus dollars targeted to build 55 ethanol fueling stations across Southern California, saying it had policy concerns about ethanol as an alternative to gasoline.

Corn-based ethanol causes more harm than good for the environment because it has to be trucked from farms in the Midwest, said council members of the Southern California Assn. of Governments.

Several also voiced concern that the council's usual process for submitting grant applications had not been followed, and that the funds would be contracted to a single recipient, San Diego-based Pearson Fuels.

"We're saying no to money from Washington," said Thomas Buckley, a Lake Elsinore representative. "It probably doesn't happen too often."

Paul Wuebben, a clean fuels officer for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, urged the council to accept the dollars. Ethanol is not perfect, he said, but its wider use would reduce dependence on gasoline and remove pollutants from the air.

About 500,000 vehicles in California are equipped to run on the ethanol blend that would have become more widely available if the stations were built, Wuebben told the panel.

He called the panel's decision a "major lost opportunity for the region." The infrastructure created by the ethanol stations could evolve over time to accommodate fuels made from other stocks. Stations could also be adapted for electric/flexible-fuels hybrid vehicles that are expected to become more popular on the market, Wuebben said.

Mike Lewis, chief of Pearson Fuels, said the project is dead without the grants. It would have created 221 jobs, he said. "Dependence on foreign oil is the result of 1,000 little decisions and a few big decisions," he said. "This was a big decision."

The \$10.9-million project was at first approved by the regional governments association in November and was set to be administered by Clean Cities, a government-industry coalition sponsored by the Department of Energy.

Thursday's vote came after the association's executive committee asked the wider panel to reconsider its decision. Lewis told council members that the project's fuel, a blend of 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline, would remove 27,000 tons of greenhouse gases from the air and eliminate the need for 700 million gallons of petroleum.

But a majority of the panel could not be swayed.

"We agree to reduce dependence on foreign oil," said Keith Millhouse, a Moorpark representative and chairman of the Metrolink governing board. "This methodology, while well intended, is a bad way to go."

Last year there were 1,950 fueling stations nationwide offering so-called E-85 ethanol fuels. In the six-county Southern California region, there are six.

GOP lawmakers seek to suspend Calif. climate law

By Samantha Young - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Merced Sun-Star and Sacramento Bee, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Republican lawmakers in California are circulating a ballot initiative backed by business interests that would suspend California's landmark law to cut greenhouse gas emissions, a signature policy of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's tenure.

The secretary of state's office this week cleared the sponsors' petition, giving them until July 5 to collect the 433,971 signatures needed to qualify it for the November ballot.

If passed by voters, the measure would suspend the 2006 law signed by Schwarzenegger until the state unemployment rate falls to 5.5 percent and stays there for a year.

The law, called the Global Warming Solutions Act but commonly referred to as AB32, mandates that California cut emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

Republicans, some small businesses and major industries have argued since the law's enactment that jobs could be lost, companies might leave the state and energy prices will skyrocket.

State Assemblyman Dan Logue, R-Linda, said Thursday it would be unfair to ask businesses to comply with new regulations in such a poor economy. California's unemployment rate is 12.4 percent.

"We'll be the only state in the country that asked our businesses to play by more expensive rules than the rest of the country," said Logue, who noted federal legislation has stalled in Congress.

Beginning in 2012, manufacturers, cement plants, oil refineries, utilities and other polluters will be asked to start lowering their emissions or pay for the carbon they emit.

Logue said Californians' electricity rates and gasoline bills will go up when the expenses of oil companies and utilities rise to comply with the law. He said businesses have committed \$600,000 to the initiative, although he declined to identify them.

Adam Mendelsohn, a spokesman for Schwarzenegger's campaign team, said the governor would fight the initiative if it qualifies.

"The governor obviously believes that this is a backwards idea," Mendelsohn said. "This is essentially politicians doing the bidding of a few special interests who opposed important environmental policy."

The California Air Resources Board, which is charged with implementing the law, has published reports showing that the state's economy will grow more than if it did not cut emissions.

Mike Mielke, who oversees environmental policy at the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, said the state's global warming law has encouraged investments in green technology and energy efficiency.

"Suspending something like AB 32, which creates this opportunity for Venture Capital investment, for businesses growth and job growth, is the wrong thing to do and is actually going to wind up costing jobs in the long-run," said Mielke, whose group is made up primarily of business interests.

U.S. Rep. Tom McClintock, who voted against the bill while he was in the state Senate, Ted Costa of People's Advocate, a Sacramento-based organization that works to restrict government spending, are the other sponsors of the initiative.

Separately, Republican gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman has said she would suspend the law if she becomes governor.

Final permit approved for Hayward power plant Opponents vow to appeal air board ruling

By Eric Kurhi, The Oakland Tribune

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Feb. 5, 2010

HAYWARD — Opponents of a 600-megawatt natural gas-fired facility at the Hayward shoreline vowed to appeal a final permit for the project approved Wednesday.

While Calpine says that its Russell City Energy Center will be the first plant in the nation to abide by federal greenhouse gas limits, opponents say it would be anything but a victory for the environment.

"We are very disappointed that the (Bay Area Air Quality Management District) would allow the building of such a facility that is unwanted and unneeded at this time," said Audrey LePell of Hayward-based Citizens Against Pollution, a group that has fought against the plant since the project was proposed nearly a decade ago.

The power plant would use twin combined-cycle generators located on 19 acres at the corner of Depot Road and Cabot Boulevard. It would be linked to the PG&E power grid and create power for use throughout the Bay Area, with a key line traversing the Bay to the Peninsula.

LePell and other opponents say a plant like Russell City is old technology that no longer should be used.

But Calpine and natural gas proponents say it's far cleaner than coal, and cleaner than gas plants using old technology, making it an ideal "in between" facility until renewable resources become more viable forms of power generation.

They say new plants like Russell City allow for older, more-polluting models to be removed from the grid.

In approving the permit, the air board — acting under the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency — made limits on gas emissions more stringent based on public comment it received last summer that indicated new technology makes it possible.

Don Neal of Calpine said it has no problem abiding by the new regulations, which started as voluntarily caps stricter than the state mandates on pollution.

He said Calpine expects federal limits to become law, given the current administration, and added that an EPA committee looking into creating such guidelines for power plants used the Russell City permit as a model at a meeting this week.

"We're trying to get ahead of the curve," he said. "Our idea was that we wanted to undertake a process for establishing (Russell City) that would be identical to what the EPA will require."

Rob Simpson, a longtime power plant opponent, called it an "exploitation of our environment and community."

"We will continue to prove that the project is illegal and a threat to public health," said Simpson, adding that such plants "continue our dependence on and support of foreign powers. Our children will remain at risk in wars to protect dependency."

While numerous other opponents — including county Supervisor Gail Steele — have spoken against the plant at public hearings, it has a fair share of supporters.

Union workers applaud the 650 construction jobs the project will create, and others have touted the millions of dollars in city revenue that will be generated by the plant. It will use reclaimed water from the neighboring city water treatment facility, and Calpine will donate \$10 million to help build a new library for Hayward.

Calpine officials said the appeal could take three to six months, but hope to break ground on the plant this year and complete it sometime in 2012.

New power plant OK'ed with greenhouse gas limits

By The Associated Press

In San Diego Union-Tribune and other papers, Friday, Feb. 5, 2010

HAYWARD, Calif. — San Francisco Bay area air quality regulators have approved a federal permit that places strict limits on a new power plant's greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmentalists hail it as an important precedent in controlling pollution from specific power plants.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District, acting on behalf of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, approved the permit for Calpine Corp. on Wednesday, clearing the way for building the Hayward plant.

Construction is scheduled to begin later this year.

Calpine says the 600-megawatt, natural gas-fired plant will be equipped with the newest pollution controls and will produce 50 percent fewer greenhouse gas emissions than the most advanced coal-fired plant. It also will produce 25 percent fewer emissions than current state standards.

New Calif. power plant gets greenhouse gas limits

By Jason Dearen, Associated Press Writer

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, Feb. 5, 2010

SAN FRANCISCO—A new power plant approved for the San Francisco Bay area will be built with strict federal limits on greenhouse gas emissions, the first such project in the nation, regulators said.

Regulators called Calpine Corp.'s new plant in Hayward an important first step in federal efforts to use the existing federal Clean Air Act to help regulate the heat-trapping gases that contribute to climate change.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District, acting on behalf of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, approved the permit for the plant, called Russell City Energy Center, on Wednesday. Construction is scheduled later this year.

"This permit is the most stringent the district has ever issued," Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the air district, said in a statement.

The 600-megawatt, natural gas-fired plant will be equipped with the newest pollution controls and will produce 50 percent fewer greenhouse gas emissions than the most advanced coal-fired plants, Calpine said.

It also is designed to produce 25 percent fewer emissions than current state standards.

Since its inception in 1970, the Clean Air Act has limited emissions from smokestacks and power plants by requiring industry to obtain clean air permits. This process forced plant owners to apply for new permits when building or upgrading power plants, requiring companies to implement the best available pollution controls.

The Calpine project's permit is significant, regulators said, because these same federal clean air permits can now be used to deal with greenhouse gas emissions.

California currently has the nation's most aggressive greenhouse gas reduction goals. A third of the state's power must come from renewable sources by 2020. Emissions must be cut by 15 percent from current levels.

The Hayward plant's approval was being used by federal environmental regulators in Washington as an example of how existing laws can be used to help regulate pollutants that contribute to climate change.

"The Calpine permit is a classic example of how the Clean Air Act can be used to limit greenhouse gas emissions while encouraging clean energy jobs," Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, said in an e-mail. "There's no reason why this sort of thing can't be replicated elsewhere."

Calpine gets OK for Hayward plant with CO₂ cap

David R. Baker, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, Feb. 5, 2010

The Bay Area will soon contain the nation's first power plant to have its greenhouse gas emissions capped by a federal government permit.

Calpine Corp. won regulatory approval on Wednesday to build in Hayward its long-delayed Russell City Energy Center, which will burn natural gas and generate enough electricity to power 450,000 typical homes.

The project's final permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency limits the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases the plant can produce - a first.

Calpine volunteered for the cap.

Although the federal government has not yet imposed greenhouse gas limits on power plants in general, it is widely expected to do so. And Russell City's design makes complying with a cap easy. The project is a "combined cycle" power plant, which recycles heat that other plants give off as waste.

"As we looked at the lay of the land, we saw the new administration coming in," said Calpine Senior Vice President Joe Ronan. "And it occurred to us, we need to get ahead of the game."

According to Calpine, Russell City will produce 50 percent fewer greenhouse gas emissions than a modern coal-fired plant and 25 percent fewer than most natural gas plants. Construction could begin later this year, creating 650 construction jobs.

Ralph Cavanagh, with the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the project shows that some businesses are ready to compete in a carbon-constrained world.

"Our expectation is that this is the wave of the future," said Cavanagh, co-director of the council's energy program. "I think Calpine is to be commended for going first. Now the challenge is to make this the norm."

California already limits greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, although in a very different way. Under rules adopted in 2007, the state's utilities can only buy electricity from plants whose emission levels are the same or lower than a typical natural gas power plant's. The rules effectively blocked the construction of coal-fired plants.

Calpine, headquartered in Houston but formerly based in San Jose, has been trying to build Russell City for years.

The project faced stiff opposition from some Hayward residents who didn't want to live downwind from it and questioned its proximity to the bay's shoreline. Others worried that hot air rising from the plant's stacks would interfere with flights into the Hayward Executive Airport. But the California Energy Commission granted the project a license in 2007, and last year, Pacific Gas and Electric Co. received regulatory approval to buy the plant's electricity.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District awarded Russell City its federal permit, acting on behalf of EPA. The district will have the responsibility for ensuring that the plant complies with its greenhouse gas limits.

Calpine will probably agree to greenhouse gas limits at other plants that it builds, said Don Neal, the company's vice president for environmental health and safety.

"I can't think of a reason we wouldn't do it, because we have the ability to do it," he said.

Senators seek sulfur dioxide pollution cuts

By Richard Cowan, Reuters

Washington Post, Friday, Feb. 5, 2010

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A bipartisan group of U.S. senators on Thursday introduced legislation aimed at slashing emissions of sulfur dioxide, mercury and nitrogen oxide from smokestacks including coal-fired power plants.

The measure, which has stalled in Congress in years past, also would set up nationwide trading systems for sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide pollution permits, its sponsors said.

But it does not tackle the much larger and controversial question of how to reduce carbon dioxide emissions blamed for climate change. Separate negotiations are underway on a greenhouse gas emissions bill.

Democratic Senator Thomas Carper, a main sponsor of the legislation unveiled on Thursday, complained that legal challenges have held up Environmental Protection Agency regulations to reduce emissions of these gases.

He now wants Congress to expand the Clean Air Act to allow Washington to mandate emissions reductions of these gases.

"Passage will not only help us clean up our nation's power sector and our nation's air, it also will provide the certainty and predictability" industry is seeking, Carper said.

Last November, EPA proposed new air quality regulations for sulfur dioxide emissions.

Supporters of the legislation say it would save 215,000 lives and more than \$2 trillion in health care costs by 2025, while costing less than \$2 a month as companies install smokestack "scrubbers" and other clean air technologies.

The pollution has been linked to asthma attacks, heart disease, strokes, lung cancer and other illnesses.

Republican Senator Lamar Alexander, who opposes federal mandates to reduce carbon emissions, said there was "no excuse for waiting" to impose reductions on the other gases, adding that technology exists to do so.

Under their bill, SO₂ emissions, which can return to earth as "acid rain," would fall by 80 percent, from 7.6 million tons in 2008 to 1.5 million in 2018; NO_x pollution would fall by 53 percent, from 3 million tons to 1.6 million tons and mercury emissions would decline by at least 90 percent by 2015.

Health and environmental groups said the proposal would "provide critical public health and ecosystem protection."

Wood burning prohibited today in Kings, Kern counties

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010

A residential wood-burning ban has been issued for today in Kings County as well as Valley portions of Kern County because of deteriorating air quality. The daylong mandatory curtailment from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is in effect until midnight tonight.

The curtailment applies to burning wood, pellets and manufactured fire logs. Fines for first-time violations start at \$50, according to the district. The "Check Before You Burn" season runs through the end of this month.

The daily wood-burning status is available by county at 4:30 p.m. each day for the following day on-line at 222.valleyair.org

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses environmentalist support EPA's proposed new smog limits, the strictest in its history. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Ambientalistas apoyan a EPA, al imponer los límites al smog más estrictos en la historia

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingue, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010

Directivos de grupos ambientalistas nacionales proporcionaron un apoyo total a la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA) en la primera audiencia pública sobre nuevos límites a la contaminación del aire. David Barón, director de EarthJustice declaró que su grupo apoya firmemente la propuesta de reducir entre 60 y 70 por cada mil millones de partes la contaminación de ozono en el país, el límite más bajo considerado en la historia estadounidense.

Este es Frank O'Donnell, de Clean Air Wartch, quien dijo que su organización pedirá a EPA reducir todavía más los límites si es posible. El principal argumento son las miles de muertes prematuras por la contaminación. La serie de audiencias públicas continúa esta mañana en Sacramento, donde se espera que grupos de California mantengan un alto respaldo a las nuevas medidas contra la contaminación.