

Power plant conversion nears OK

By Reed Fujii

Stockton Record, Saturday, Sept. 4, 2010

DTE Energy plans to install a \$100 million biomass power plant at the Port of Stockton, converting an existing coal-fired cogeneration facility to burn waste wood from urban and agricultural sources.

Port officials will consider granting a lease to the energy company during a public hearing Tuesday.

Detroit-based DTE Energy said conversion of the former Port of Stockton District Energy Facility plant at 2526 W. Washington St. to a 45-megawatt wood-burning unit would, beginning in 2013, provide California consumers 360,000 megawatt-hours per year of renewable energy.

With state-of-the-art pollution controls, a DTE presentation billed the Stockton project as "one of the cleanest solid-fuel-burning power plants in North America."

The company, whose largest subsidiaries are Detroit Edison and Michigan Consolidated Gas Co., said the plant would provide 50 full-time jobs once it is operational, compared with 30 workers formerly employed by POSDEF, and 100 construction jobs during 18- to 24-month conversion.

Officials are excited about the DTE project, Port Director Richard Aschieris said.

"This is a particularly pivotal project, I feel, for the San Joaquin Valley in that the old POSDEF facility was a coal-fired energy producing facility," he said. "Now it's going to be at the other end of the spectrum - one of the cleanest energy-producing facilities in the Valley."

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is reviewing the DTE project, said Seyed Sadredin, an air pollution control officer.

"It's moving forward, and I think it's something we can approve based on the information we've received, ... but we haven't issued the permit yet," he said.

Saredin said the jury is also out on the project's overall impact.

"If it's carefully planned and designed, they could provide a net overall benefit to the environment," he said. But that would depend on factors such as the type of wastes collected and any impacts from transporting wood wastes to the plant site and any wood-shredding operations.

Saredin said the district would be interested to see the diversion of wastes from orchard pruning or orchard and vineyard removal that are now simply piled up and burned in open fields.

The air district has eliminated 90 percent of agricultural burning activities and is pushing to make it 100 percent.

"Having biomass capacity to have an outlet for farmers to take their waste to would help in that equation," Saredin said.

Stockton port commissioners first considered the DTE lease Aug. 2 but delayed final approval over concerns they were dealing with DTE Stockton LLC, a subsidiary of DTE Woodland LLC, itself a subsidiary of DTE Energy Services.

Aschieris said the port had received additional assurances about the financial soundness of the project.

"We do feel confident we're not going to be in a ... scenario where we have a half-completed project," he said.

There was no real concern about the stability of DTE Energy itself, Aschieris added.

"It's more of a reflection of just the uncertain economic times that we're in," he said. "Because of the economic times, we have to look more carefully at those kinds of corporate setups."

In 2009, the company reported earnings of \$532 million, or \$3.24 a share, on revenues of \$8 billion. It has more than 10,000 employees.

SoCal board endorses lowered emission goals

By Jacob Adelman, AP Writer
Business Journal Fri., Sept. 3, 2010

(AP) — Members of Southern California's regional planning body voted Thursday to endorse lower greenhouse gas reduction targets than state regulators had proposed to comply with legislation that seeks to ease emissions by fighting sprawl and boosting public transit.

The Southern California Association of Governments' regional council voted 29-21 to try to reduce emissions by 6 percent by 2020 and 8 percent by 2035 by fighting sprawl and boosting public transit.

The California Air Resources Board, which will take the council's vote into account when it sets final targets later this month, initially proposed that the body endorse an 8 percent reduction by 2020 and a 13 percent drop by 2035.

But some building industry and business representatives said those goals were unattainable and would lead to higher taxes and fewer construction jobs.

Richard Lambros, executive director of the Building Industry Association of Southern California, praised the decision by the regional council, which is made up of elected officials from the association's 189 member cities.

"They made a decision that is both aggressive and achievable and will make a significant reduction in emissions while still protecting California's economy," said Lambros, whose industry could have faced greater restrictions under the more aggressive goals.

The regional council agreed to consider working toward the state's more aggressive targets if certain provisions are met, such as increased state funding.

The Air Resources Board pledged to continue working with the association and other regional agencies to meet the state's pollution goals.

"We agree that it is important to secure additional state and local funding sources to provide transportation options and develop our communities in more sustainable and healthy ways," board spokesman Stanley Young said in a statement.

In endorsing the limited goals, the council voted against the recommendations of the association's staff, which had said the steeper reductions would save the state some \$7.7 billion in productivity losses due to traffic delays, among other benefits.

The more ambitious targets would also have put Southern California in line with goals already endorsed by regional planning bodies in the rest of the state.

"We're disappointed," said American Lung Association in California spokesman Paul Knepprath, who was among the health experts, environmental advocates, urban property developers and city officials who spoke out in favor of the tougher goals before the vote.

"We would have liked to see higher targets and for them to be more aggressive about reducing air pollution for people living in Southern California," he continued.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Sunday, Sept. 5, 2010:](#)

Record low number of ozone violations, but air still too dirty

By Mark Grossi

There's a pretty good chance this will be the cleanest ozone season on record in the San Joaquin Valley, but don't get the idea the air is clean.

As schoolchildren are out playing and enjoying the September sunshine, the ozone concentration is higher than the federal health standard throughout this region.

Fifteen of the 23 Valley air monitors showed violations on Wednesday. Most of them happened in the afternoon. For instance, Hanford's highest ozone readings came between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m., when a lot of children are outside.

Ozone is a corrosive gas that attacks skin, eyes and lungs. It will make the rubber on your tires crack eventually, so imagine what it does to your lungs.

Keep an eye on the air district's web page and find out for yourself what's going on in your county. This is the site where I found the ozone numbers for Hanford. There are other cities listed. Check them out.