

## **San Joaquin Valley utilities and firms work to meet green energy mandates**

By John Holland

Modesto Bee, Monday, January 3, 2011

The sun performed as promised at Jim Jasper's business near Newman.

He installed about 4,000 panels that capture solar energy for use in processing almonds at Stewart & Jasper Orchards.

Jasper said he expects to save as much as \$250,000 on his Pacific Gas & Electric Co. bill each year. But he said something else that gets to the crux of the renewable energy debate:

"It doesn't pencil out without the subsidies."

Solar, wind and other renewable sources may have finally come of age, after four decades of promise from their promoters. But the technologies still tend to cost more than conventional sources such as hydroelectric, natural gas and coal.

The extra cost is covered in part by utility rate increases, including the one that took effect Saturday in the Modesto Irrigation District.

And the federal government helps with up to 30 percent of the cost with income tax credits for homes and businesses. Those lost taxes add to the national debt.

Advocates say renewable sources are worth the cost because they reduce the need for fossil fuels, which pollute the planet and mire the nation in messy foreign affairs.

"One of the huge advantages of solar is that once you build it, the fuel is free," said Paul McMillan, principal for the utility group at SunPower Corp. in San Jose.

His company is planning a 160-acre solar installation on North McHenry Avenue. It would meet 2 percent of the demand in the MID, which gets 18 percent of its power from wind turbines in Solano County and the Pacific Northwest.

The Turlock Irrigation District gets 28 percent of its power from Northwest wind. PG&E, which serves most of Northern California, is close to 20 percent renewable.

All the utilities are under a state mandate to get at least 33 percent of their supply from renewable sources by 2020. Lawmakers have talked of making it 50 percent.

MID officials said the current mandate adds about \$7 to average residential bills that had been \$139.55 per month before the rate hike.

The increase came over protests from the Stanislaus Taxpayers Association. Its president, Dave Thomas, said the MID should wait until closer to the 2020 deadline so it could find cheaper renewable sources.

"I think they've gone headlong, like a freight train busting through a snow drift, without any consideration for the requirements," he said.

Thomas said he doubts the job-creation claims about renewable energy: "If it's labor-intensive, it's going to be expensive."

The MID has agreed to pay 17 cents per kilowatt-hour for the McHenry solar power, double the average cost for its power sources.

The TID did not raise rates this year but could do so next year to cover the cost of repaying the debt that financed the wind energy. That source is expected to cost about 11 cents per kilowatt-hour.

### **Big dams don't count**

The renewable mandate excludes large hydro plants, so the MID and the TID do not get credit for the supply from Don Pedro Reservoir. It would have helped both toward the 33 percent goal at low cost.

The large-hydro exclusion does not sit well with Waterford area resident Todd Sill, who has urged the MID board to redouble its efforts to overturn it.

"One question keeps nagging at me," he wrote in an e-mail to the California Air Resources Board. "Are the government and the environmentalist groups, through regulations and mandates, intentionally trying to create an energy crisis in California just as they have created a water crisis using the same methods?"

With large hydro out, the utilities will have to look at other sources.

One possibility is burning wood chips from orchards or other sources. The MID board last year rejected a proposed Modesto plant that would meet 9 percent of its demand at 10 cents per kilowatt-hour, after several residents claimed it would pollute the air. The developers still hope to strike a deal with MID or another utility.

Another potential source is the manure from the area's many dairy farms. The Fiscalini and Joseph Farms cheese companies have built digesters that burn methane from the waste, but this is still a tiny part of the Northern San Joaquin Valley's supply.

### **Turbines unlikely in valley**

Some of the earliest wind turbines were built at Altamont Pass and other sites flanking the valley, but they likely will not spread across the valley floor because of wind patterns and land costs.

MID and TID chose wind from the Columbia River Gorge because it blows especially hard and transmission lines are in place. They and several partners backed off plans for wind and solar from Lassen County because they would require new lines that raised a furor from people along the route.

Tim Fisher, who heads the energy program at the Great Valley Center in Modesto, said the region's abundant sunshine and open land favor solar.

"The downside to the solar potential is that you are trading land that produces food for land that produces energy," said Fisher, a former city councilman.

Stanislaus County officials hope to avoid this conflict by seeking proposals for large solar installations at the Fink Road landfill and the former Geer Road dump.

Roland Winston, an engineering professor at the University of California at Merced, said several solar technologies show promise.

One is the familiar photovoltaic cell, which converts sunlight directly into electricity. Another is solar thermal energy, where the sun heats water to create steam for food processing and other uses.

Generating power with the valley's own resources would reduce the amount of money that goes to outside suppliers of gas and other sources.

### **Projects could bring jobs**

Current and planned renewable projects could create 68,366 to 79,512 construction jobs and 765 to 3,727 jobs for people operating the systems, according to a study last year by UC Merced economics professor Shawn Kantor.

"The emerging clean energy sector provides the promise of jolting the SJV economy that has been wracked by the recent recession," he said.

Fisher said many of the technical jobs could be filled by people with community college degrees and pay perhaps \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year.

Panelized Structures Inc. of Modesto has seen a sharp drop in demand for its large commercial buildings but steady work for its solar installation branch, president Keith Coonce said.

About 50 people do this work for the company, 35 of them in Modesto. The projects include rooftop arrays at O'Brien's Market on Dale Road and the Frito-Lay Inc. plant on Garner Road.

"I like the growth opportunities for solar in the Modesto area," Coonce said.

JKB Energy, formed by a home builder, employs about 25 people on solar projects, general manager Bob Hansen said. Its clients include the SupHerb Farms herb processing plant in Turlock and the Hilltop Ranch almond plant near Ballico.

Some valley projects are installed by outside companies, but they contend that the region still gets an economic benefit. A typical commercial project can pay for itself in five or six years through utility bill savings, said Jennifer Monteleone, vice president for strategic marketing for SPG Solar in Novato.

### **Solar ideal for food plants**

The valley's many food processors are ideal for solar because of the high demand for cold storage and other energy uses, she said. SPG's projects include Stewart & Jasper and the nearby Cebro Frozen Foods Inc. plant.

Jasper said his system, installed three months ago, is especially useful for hulling and shelling of almonds in the fall. The tax credit and a PG&E rebate covered about 70 percent of the nearly \$5 million cost, he said.

Proponents say mass production and efficiency improvements will eventually bring down the cost of getting power from the sun.

"It's a stable source," Winston said. "The sun's going to be around for billions of years, giving out pretty much the same energy."

### **Renewable Shares**

- The Modesto Irrigation District gets 18 percent of its electricity from renewable sources. Almost all of it is from wind turbines in Solano County, Oregon and Washington. The figure is expected to rise to 26 percent by the end of this year, mainly with wind additions.
- The Turlock Irrigation District gets 28 percent from renewable sources, almost all of it from a Washington wind project.
- Pacific Gas & Electric Co. projected its 2010 renewable share at 17 percent to 19 percent. The main sources include biomass, geothermal, wind and small hydroelectric systems.

Note: The state's 33 percent renewable mandate does not include large hydro plants, such as the one the MID and the TID own at Don Pedro reservoir.

## **Rain then mostly sunny today: High 55; low 27**

Visalia Times Delta and Tulare Advance Register, Monday, January 3, 2011

A winter storm is in progress over the Tulare County foothills and mountains. The potential for major flooding has passed, however showers could cause minor flooding in the most saturated areas, according to the National Weather Service.

Rain and snow will taper off through Tuesday and by mid week patchy dense fog can be expected during the late night and morning hours.

Today there is a 40 percent chance of rain. High 55; low 27. Sunny Tuesday and Wednesday.

A wind advisory is in effect until 10 a.m. for the lower Grapevine where gusts could reach 50 mph.

Air quality today is good, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Wood burning is allowed today.

## **New traffic laws for new year**

By Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times Delta, Saturday, January 1, 2011

With the ringing in of the new year, a new crop of traffic laws will go into effect.

Among them are new rules for motorcycle learner's permits, new rules for vehicle code violations and new regulations for towing fees. The new rules include:

- > Giving courts the right to order a 10-year revocation of a driver's license if a person has been convicted of three or more DUIs.
- > Requiring motorcycle drivers under 21 to complete a 15-hour safety training course before receiving a learner's permit, and they're required to have that permit a full six months before applying for a license.
- > Banning a growing practice by local jurisdictions that choose to ignore the state laws governing traffic violations, known as the Vehicle Code, and instead cite drivers for traffic violations under vague local ordinances with varying penalties.
- > Outlawing the possession of any device designed to bypass the factory-installed ignition of a motorcycle in order to start the engine without the manufacturer's key.
- > Requiring towing companies to give consumers a Towing Fees and Access Notice and an itemized invoice of all towing and storage fees.
- > Prohibiting local transportation agencies, such as the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in the Bay Area, from selling or disseminating the personal information of subscribers to electronic toll collection systems such as FASTRAK.
- > Extending the life of the yellow and white clean-air sticker for low-emission vehicles. Vehicles bearing these valid stickers can continue to access HOV lanes regardless of vehicle occupancy.
- > Developing a website to provide consumers with information about charging plug-in hybrid or fully electric vehicles.

### **Lawsuit filed against VWR plan in Visalia**

Visalia Times Delta and Tulare Advance Register, Friday, December 31, 2010

Teamsters Joint Council 7 and Visalia resident Kevin Long have filed suit in Superior Court against laboratory supply company VWR International, the city of Visalia and others, to stop construction of a 500,000-square-foot distribution center in northwest Visalia's industrial park.

Critics say it will generate up to "10,000 truck trips daily." The trucks will transport hazardous chemicals, emit dangerous particulate in the air and travel through residential neighborhoods significantly impacting air quality, traffic and noise, the suit states.

The suit seeks to halt construction until environmental and public-health clearances are obtained.

### **American Lung Association Selects Eleven Biggest 'Clean Air' Events of 2010**

By American Lung Association

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, December 30, 2010

WASHINGTON, Dec. 30, 2010 -- #11 celebrates over 160,000 lives saved in 2010, thanks to the Clean Air Act

2010 marks 40th Anniversary of this landmark legislation

WASHINGTON, Dec. 30, 2010 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The American Lung Association has released its list of eleven biggest 'clean air' events of 2010. Eight events marked milestones that provide greater protection from dangerous air pollutants, while three represented delays that have life-threatening consequences.

The Lung Association issued the list of 'clean air' events in honor of the 40th anniversary of the Clean Air Act, the historic law that has helped protect Americans from breathing dirty, unhealthy air, and an event celebrated on the list.

Passed by a bipartisan Congress in 1970, the Clean Air Act has succeeded in enabling the U.S. to cut emissions of the six most widespread air pollutants by 60 percent, while the economy grew by over 200 percent. In 2010 alone, the Clean Air Act has saved the lives of over 160,000 people, according to preliminary estimates.

"Everyone has a right to breathe healthy air. The Clean Air Act is a promise that our lawmakers made to the American people to make the air we all breathe safer. That promise must be kept," said Charles D. Connor, President and CEO, American Lung Association.

America has much cleaner air than it did in 1970. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is tasked with enforcing the Clean Air Act and while progress was made this year on many fronts, delays have stalled efforts needed to provide the health protections promised under the Act.

The eleven biggest 'clean air' events of 2010 included the following:

Old, dirty diesel engines cleaned up. Dirty diesel school buses and other diesel equipment across the nation got much cleaner thanks to major investments this year. Congress invested \$300 million to clean up dirty diesel engines in 2009-2010 under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). Congress also invested in Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) programs, including \$77 million in grants to clean up school buses, trucks, and construction equipment.

Stronger limits on toxics from cement kilns. EPA took final action to significantly reduce emissions of mercury, acid gases, particulate matter and other air pollutants from 158 Portland cement kilns in the United States. Cleaning up these emissions will save as many as 2,500 lives each year by 2013.

Cleanup of ocean-going ships steering for U.S. ports. Exhaust spewing from the diesel engines on large ocean-going ships can pollute areas hundreds of miles from the coast. EPA can now require all international ships within 200 nautical miles of U.S. waters to limit emissions similar to rules U.S. marine diesel engines must meet. These and other changes will save up to 30,000 lives a year by 2030 when the changes are fully in place.

New limits on tailpipe exhaust. In 2010, the EPA put in place a historic national program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide and other air pollutants, from cars, SUVs and light trucks.

First new limits in 39 years on two dangerous pollutants. For the first time since 1971, EPA strengthened the official limits, called the national air quality standard, on nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>). The new standards will protect vulnerable individuals and communities who live or work near major roads and highways and near power plants.

Cleanup proposed for power plants that spew smog and soot. In July, EPA proposed the Clean Air Transport Rule to cut emissions from power plants that create ozone (smog) and particle pollution (soot). This rule targets power plant pollution blown across state lines, helping reduce air pollution in communities in the Northeast, Midwest and Southeastern states.

Delay in cleaning up toxic industrial pollution. In April, EPA proposed steps to reduce toxic air emissions of mercury, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and acid gases from industrial plants, commercial settings and large institutions. However, in December EPA announced it wanted to delay the final rule long past the original January 2011 deadline. Unfortunately, the delay means that vulnerable individuals and burdened communities near these facilities will continue to have to breathe these industrial poisons until EPA acts.

Delay in protecting children's health from ozone smog. In December, EPA announced that it would delay setting protective new limits for ground-level ozone (smog). Ozone is the most widespread pollutant in the nation, triggers children's asthma attacks and can even kill. This announcement marked the third delay following the January 2010, proposal to strengthen the current limit set in 2008. EPA's delay in setting a final national air quality standard means that cleanup measures across the country will be delayed at least six more months, continuing the risk to lives and health.

Delay in protecting public health from particle pollution. EPA planned to propose new national limits, or standards, for particle pollution (soot) in November 2010, but delayed that announcement until February 2011. Particle pollution can shorten life, cause asthma attacks, heart attacks, and strokes. EPA's delay means that more lives remain at risk of early death for longer, as particle levels remain much too high.

Monitoring air pollution from Gulf oil spill. In response to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the cleanup efforts during the spring and summer of 2010, EPA closely monitored air pollutants that posed threats to the health of residents and cleanup personnel along the Gulf Coast. EPA posted all the monitoring data on its website.

160,000 lives saved this year thanks to the Clean Air Act. Passed in 1970 by Congress, the Act has succeeded in enabling the U.S. to cut emissions of the six most widespread air pollutants by 60 percent since then, all while the economy grew by over 200 percent, according to EPA's analysis. In 2010 alone, the Clean Air Act's public health protections saved the lives of over 160,000 people, according to EPA's preliminary estimates.

For more information on 2010's biggest 'clean air' events, please visit the American Lung Association's presentation online: [www.lungusa.org/11-clean-air-events](http://www.lungusa.org/11-clean-air-events)

About the American Lung Association:

Now in its second century, the American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. With your generous support, the American Lung Association is "Fighting for Air" through research, education and advocacy. For more information about the American Lung Association, a Charity Navigator Four Star Charity and holder of the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Guide Seal, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or visit [www.LungUSA.org](http://www.LungUSA.org).