

Green energy law will increase rates for Californians, utilities say

Rick Daysog – The Sacramento Bee

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California consumers could see sharp electricity rate increases under sweeping new legislation that would require them to ramp up their energy supplies from wind, solar and other green sources, local utilities said.

On Thursday, the state Assembly voted 55-19 to approve a measure requiring power companies to obtain up to 33 percent of their energy supplies from green sources, up sharply from the current 20 percent. The state Senate already has passed the bill.

The measure, which requires the approval of Gov. Jerry Brown, aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in California while boosting jobs in the state's fast-growing green economy.

But utilities say they face steep cost increases to comply with the measure.

"We're looking at (an additional) cost over \$120 million by 2020," said Michael Bloom, Roseville Electric's assistant electric utility director.

Bloom said Roseville Electric, which gets about 20 percent of its supply from renewable sources, would have to increase rates for its 55,000 customers as much as 5 percent over the next two years. By 2020, Bloom estimated, the utility would have to raise rates a total of 15 percent.

PG&E and SMUD would likely face similar cost increases.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District, which has nearly 600,000 customers in the Sacramento region, gets about 23 percent of its power supply from renewable sources.

Lawyers say plant leaked toxic chemical for years

By Gosia Wozniacka, Associated Press

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FRESNO, Calif.—Company officials failed to alert residents and collect data about groundwater, air and soil contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals from a Central California manufacturing plant owned by a former subsidiary of drug maker Merck & Co., lawyers for nearby residents told jurors Tuesday in closing arguments of a lawsuit.

Attorney Mick Marderosian, who represents 2,000 plaintiffs, said the defendants—Merck & Co., Amsted Industries Inc., Meadowbrook Water Co. and Baltimore Aircoil Co. Inc.—didn't alert a Merced housing community directly across the street from the plant about contamination from hexavalent chromium, the chemical made famous in the film "Erin Brockovich."

The now-shuttered Baltimore Aircoil plant, which manufactured cooling towers, used the chemicals to pressure-treat wood from 1969 to 1991. Merck, which owned Baltimore Aircoil until it sold it in 1985 to Amsted, is leading the remediation effort. The plant was shut down in 1994.

"There was massive release of chemicals. They migrated, entered the air and water in areas where people would have been exposed," Marderosian told jurors in U.S. District Court in Fresno. "People were subject to contamination without their knowledge."

The first phase of the trial focused on whether contamination did leak from the plant. If jurors find that to be true, the second phase would address whether residents were harmed by the chemical exposure.

Merck officials acknowledged that hexavalent chromium contamination occurred but denied that any of it left the confines of the plant at levels that could have harmed the health of residents.

"Did contamination migrate to a location where it could impact residents? The answer is no," Merck attorney John Barg said.

Barg said Merck and the other defendants made significant efforts to reach residents by knocking on doors and searching for domestic water wells. Marderosian countered that no evidence existed of any public notice until 2007.

Plaintiff Scott Davis, a Beachwood resident whose wife had a miscarriage and died of breast cancer at 36, previously said neither he nor any of his neighbors were ever notified of any contamination.

Davis said outside court last week that he didn't find out about the situation until he heard about the lawsuit. Davis, who lived near the plant for more than 15 years until moving in 2000, said dozens of neighbors developed ailments ranging from brain tumors to cancers to leukemia.

"If we had just known something, I could have gotten my wife out of the area," he said. "I could have gotten bottled water. I could have done something, anything."

State regulators testified during the trial that they see no current evidence of contamination outside the plant site or evidence of contaminated drinking water.

Marderosian said a contamination plume in the groundwater polluted the primary well supplying domestic water to Merced's Beachwood subdivision, located about 1,600 feet from the site.