

Port biomass plant gets air district OK

By Alex Breitler, staff writer

Stockton Record, Sat., June 18, 2011

STOCKTON - Air quality officials have approved a plan to convert an old coal-burning power plant at the Port of Stockton to a cleaner, wood-burning biomass plant.

That recent blessing from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District was the final high-level approval required for the \$100 million project, said John Austerberry, a spokesman for Detroit-based DTE Energy Services.

Construction is expected to begin July 1, he said, with the plant going online by summer 2013.

"We will convert to 100 percent biomass, which provides a lot of environmental benefits," Austerberry said. "We want this to be as clean as possible."

A number of local officials have voiced support for the project.

DTE said converting the old POSDEF plant will create about 100 temporary construction jobs. About 50 people will work at the refurbished biomass plant once it is online, and DTE estimates 100 jobs will be created through companies that supply the plant with the wood fuel needed to generate power.

That wood will include urban wood waste, tree trimmings and agricultural prunings. Officials are hoping to get the fuel from sources as close to Stockton as possible, Austerberry said.

The plant will provide about 45 megawatts of power generation.

DTE already has a biomass plant in Woodland and is converting another in Bakersfield.

Stockton firm takes charge with electric trucks

Air quality board OKs \$1.4M deal for truck subsidy

By Reed Fujii, staff writer

Stockton Record, Fri., June 17, 2011

San Joaquin Valley clean air officials Thursday approved a \$1.4 million grant that should bring 50 electric delivery vans - to be built in the Valley - to the streets of Stockton, Fresno and Bakersfield.

Together with a similar project for urban Southern California, Stockton-based Electric Vehicles International is to build 100 all-electric walk-in vans for use by UPS in the three Valley metropolitan areas.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District funds cap a stack of public and private cost sharing to build the unprecedented fleet.

UPS will spend \$100,000 per truck, about \$35,000 more than the price of a comparable diesel-powered van. California will kick in \$50,000 on each vehicle through three separate incentive programs.

The air district's funds amount to \$28,000 apiece, and EVI will knock off \$5,000 from its full price of nearly \$183,000.

Stockton Mayor Ann Johnston, who is also the air district's vice chairwoman, hailed the grant approval.

"This is a real indication that UPS is convinced or believes that these vehicles will not only help them do their business better but be better for the environment," she said. "That helps all of us."

However, she added language to the grant approval that requires the vehicles be assembled within the Valley district's boundaries, having learned the company might be looking to leave Stockton, where it set up headquarters in late 2009.

Summer Pennino, an EVI spokeswoman, said the company has received relocation offers from other states and other communities in California.

"We understand that today's condition of approval of this incentive, requiring the vehicles to be assembled in the Valley, is a signal of support from San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District," she wrote in an email. "We fully commit to manufacture the vehicles within the Valley."

Also, she said, "Today's 50-vehicle deployment will create about 13 direct jobs in Stockton and is expected to support another 20-26 indirect jobs within the Valley."

And there is the possibility there could be more work after that.

William O'Brien, a Stanislaus County supervisor and an air board member, put the air district on track to offer at least another \$1.4 million in incentives for electric delivery vehicles in the Valley, making the grants available to other companies and communities.

He asked officials to "create a program in the air district that will be at least the same \$1.4 million we gave out today that will be opened up to all businesses in the Valley."

The trucks are very expensive, O'Brien allowed, but such is the cost of innovation.

"When technology first comes out, it's very expensive. Once it's tested and proven, that price will go down," he said.

A large part of program is aimed at advancing technology, said Todd De-Young, grants program manager for the air district.

"We're at the beginning stages of this type of technology that has the range and capacity to serve these types of markets well," he said.

Over time, as technology improves and the volume of production increases, prices should fall. Eventually," DeYoung said. "We anticipate these things being much, much closer in costs to a conventional diesel vehicle."

And, of course, the zero-emissions vans will have immediate clean air and health benefits, removing a source of diesel exhaust and soot from Valley streets and also cutting down on components of summer smog.

Crews work in park to prevent fires

Visalia Times-Delta, Fri., June 17, 2011

National Park Service fire crews will be working on the Ash Mountain hazard fuel reduction project in Sequoia National Park (between 1,700 and 3,000 feet in elevation) over the next two weeks. This project includes weed whacking and prescribed fires.

Prescribed fires consist of eight small segments (between 1 and 7 acres) between the Buckeye Housing area and Hospital Rock Picnic Area. The first prescribed fire is planned for Monday, weather and [air quality](#) conditions permitting. Additional units may be completed in the upcoming two weeks and may include a roadside unit along the Generals Highway entering the park (near Cricket Hollow), near the Research Center, near the Foothills Visitor Center and below the maintenance yard in Sequoia National Park.

Each burn segment takes less than a day to finish and ignitions should be completed by early afternoon. In all segments, the ground fuels are grass and scattered brush, which burns quickly and produces smoke for short periods. For residents and employees near these areas, it is recommended to keep windows closed. Ignition days will be coordinated with the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog](#), Fri., June 17, 2011:

Cool, breezy start to ozone season

By Mark Grossi

With the long, cool, breezy spring, I thought the San Joaquin Valley might be on a record-setting pace for least ozone violations. It's close.

The totals are running just about the same as they were last year, which was the record-setting season in the Valley.

I actually was mildly surprised to see 10 violations. It just seemed like the air quality has been better than that.

There is another little surprise. Porterville is tied for the highest number of violations with five. Don't remember Porterville being a hot spot in the past.

Sequoia National Park also has five -- which, as I've discussed many times here, is weird but not surprising. The park's monitor is in the foothills where ozone from Valley cities seems to rise.

If you're keeping score, Antelope Valley has the most violations, followed by South Coast and Coachella Valley. The San Joaquin Valley is fourth.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thurs., June 16, 2011:](#)

Air board moving to iPads to replace 500-page agenda binder

By Mark Grossi

Local air district board members soon will be reading their 500-page agenda packages on iPads - at a substantial savings for the public.

The governing board today approved the \$15,000 purchase of the tablet computers to replace the massive binders, which cost the district about \$32,000 a year for paper and staff time to compile each month.

Many other public agencies are considering the same move. The city of Stockton, for instance, is getting iPads next week for council members, according to one official.

Air board members will simply download agenda documents each month and read them on their tablet computers, which weigh less than two pounds.

The district will begin a three-month testing period in August. Both paper and computer downloads will be used to make sure the system works.

If all goes well, the district will save tens of thousands of dollars each year, and use about 250,000 fewer pieces of paper.