

West Kern Water District Proposes to Build Solar Panels to Provide Electrical Power to Pump Our Water

By Jane McCabe, staff writer

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Because Taft is 800 feet above the San Joaquin basin the water we use has to be pumped uphill. It takes a great deal of energy, electrical energy, to accomplish this task and costs a great deal—a million dollars a year—a cost that is passed on to us in our water bills.

As Harry O. Starkey, director of the West Kern Water District, explains it, the water we use is stored in “artificial ground water banks” in the valley and is “levied up” using electrical pumps as needed. Currently, the electrical power needed for this Herculean task is provided by the Pacific Gas & Electric Company using gas engines at a cost that rises about 6% per year.

Mr. Starkey has been studying the feasibility of providing the needed electrical power by constructing solar panels—he is excited by the results of his findings. After their construction solar panels would provide 25 years of clean and efficient power with a minimum of maintenance. Only a small amount of time would be required to monitor them. This project would “redefine for decades a lower cost power.”

There are other advantages. Gas engines emit unhealthy emissions into the environment. The emission requirement is imposed by the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#). With the gas engines, it's becoming more difficult to stay within compliance. “This solar project could provide relief from that regulatory reality.”

Mr. Starkey explains how the panels operate in this way: Sunlight interacts with the chemical composition of the panel and by virtue of this interaction a small amount of electricity is created. That's why a large number of panels are needed to produce a large amount of electricity. This isn't a problem in arid lands where there is a lot of unused, flat land.

Two installations are being proposed, the “North Project” off of Station Road and near the Tule Elk Reserve, where five installations would cover twenty acres and another, “South Project” near the Kern River Bypass Chanel. Both sites are on land owned by the county.

Mr. Starkey is analyzing the project's financial feasibility. His department plans to recommend building the panels to the water board within 30 to 60 days. If approved, construction would start in 90 days.

“Renewables,” like solar energy, create the certainty of low-cost power and “redefines for decades lower cost power.” According to Mr. Starkey, West Kern County has the most affordable water in California, and the solar panels would keep it that way.

Business groups say new smog rule will hurt economy and Obama in 2012

By Renee Schoof, McClatchy Papers

In the Fresno Bee, Sunday, July 24, 2011

WASHINGTON -- Within weeks, the Environmental Protection Agency is expected to tighten the national standard for ozone, the main ingredient in smog. In last-minute lobbying, business groups are warning that the country can't afford cleaner air in an economic downturn and that President Barack Obama can't afford it politically, either.

Ozone inflames the airways, makes it hard to breathe, worsens asthma and other lung ailments, and increases the risk of death from lung or heart disease.

The Bush administration in 2008 set the ozone standard at 75 parts per billion, even though EPA scientists and the EPA's independent science advisory panel said it should be set a 60 to 70 parts per billion. Facing a lawsuit from the attorneys general of 14 states, the Obama

administration's EPA decided not to defend the Bush standard but instead decide whether it should be changed.

The Business Roundtable, comprising chief executive officers of top U.S. corporations, argued in a letter to the White House this month that the Bush-era standard should remain unchanged because any change under consideration "threatens to seriously impede economic expansion."

In areas where the standard isn't met, new businesses or those that expand would have to install emissions controls to avoid worsening ozone levels. The letter said that these costs, plus uncertainty and bureaucratic delays, could lead businesses to close some facilities and open new ones elsewhere, including outside the U.S.

The Roundtable said a new rule for ozone levels would cost businesses \$20 billion to \$90 billion annually, depending on how tough the EPA makes it.

Ozone is mainly a problem in summer because sunlight and heat help it form from emissions from fossil-fuel burning, oil and gas drilling and chemical solvents.

Because there are many sources and because ozone can travel hundreds of miles, cities and rural areas alike can have high levels.

American Petroleum Institute president and chief executive officer Jack Gerard said the ozone standard is "all about jobs, and I believe it is the most significant regulation right now that will stand in the way of job creation."

Obama could overrule EPA's plans and stick to the Bush standard.

It's the "first true test" of the president's interest in creating jobs, Gerard said at a news conference. He said the country couldn't afford tighter ozone rules.

"That would be a high burden on an economy that's already pretty fragile," agreed John Engler, president of the Business Roundtable.

The country is headed into a presidential election that will focus mainly on jobs, and the ozone rule would be a job killer, said Engler, a Republican and former Michigan governor. "We think this really represents a test of, is the president serious or not."

A White House official, who didn't want to be identified because the standard hasn't been announced yet, said: "There's been a lot of speculation out there. The truth is that this administration will continue to put in place smart standards that are based on science and the law, and at the same time the president has been clear that when it comes to implementing a standard, we will do so in a way that maximizes flexibility to ensure it does not impede our economic recovery in any way.

"He believes that it is essential that considerations of cost and impacts on local communities and businesses are a fundamental part of proposals to meet the standard," the official said.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson wrote recently that ozone is "among the most widespread and stubborn air pollutants" and is "responsible for tens of thousands of visits to emergency rooms by Americans each year for serious bronchial conditions, including asthma."

Children are at a higher risk because their lungs are still developing and they spend more time playing outside. Senior citizens also are especially vulnerable. Healthy younger adults also can be harmed by ozone if they exercise outside on bad air days.

Jackson, in a public letter to Sen. Thomas Carper, D-Del., wrote that flexibility brought compliance costs down to "a fraction" of the tens of billions a year that business groups warned about when the Clinton administration tightened the standard in 1997.

Some improvements in ozone will come from pollution reduction required in another rule the EPA recently made final. It will reduce power plant emissions that spread ozone.