

Truckers charged up

Electric stations offer power without idling at Flying J truck stop

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Friday, Aug. 10, 2012

LODI - Tom Howard gestured toward his big rig. "Step inside my office," he said.

With pleasure. It was 75 degrees in the cab, unlike the broiling asphalt parking lot at the Flying J truck stop. And Howard's "office" muffled the noise of an endless parade of trucks outside.

This is the comfort and peace that a long-distance trucker needs to get a good night's sleep.

And on Thursday, it got a lot easier to rest while complying with no-idling laws.

Howard, a manager with San Francisco-based Veritable Vegetable, was the first to plug into 36 new electric-charging stations on pedestals perched along the perimeter of the Flying J parking lot, near Interstate 5 and Highway 12.

Officials said it was the first truck stop in the San Joaquin Valley to be equipped with exterior plug-in stations - or "energy vending machines," as Alan Baker calls them.

"It's an idea whose time has come. Most people who see it say, 'Why hasn't it happened before?'" said Baker, vice president of New York-based Shorepower Technologies.

The U.S. Department of Energy awarded Shorepower and the nonprofit Cascade Sierra Solutions about \$22 million in stimulus money to electrify 50 truck stops across the nation - on major highway arteries like Interstate 5.

The juice was turned on Thursday in Lodi.

Some of the money will also be used to help truckers purchase integrated electric heating and cooling systems, although any trucker could use the new stations by simply running an extension cord out the window.

Pollution laws prevent California truckers from simply idling their trucks while they rest. So, until now, they've had to purchase expensive and heavy on-board generators to keep the air conditioning, heater, television, microwave, coffee maker and other features running.

Or, they had to risk running afoul of the law.

On top of that, burning diesel is an expensive way to keep the AC on. It costs about \$4 an hour, Shorepower estimates. Plugging in, on the other hand, will cost about \$1 an hour.

"Why would you want to spend \$4 an hour? Plus, you're polluting the air," said Howard, whose company ships veggies across several Western states. Some of the plug-in stations are powerful enough even for his refrigerated trailer.

Trucks are one of the biggest sources of pollution in the Valley, and truckers have been pinched by new regulations to clean up their emissions.

Projects like this will make it just a bit easier, said Scott Blevins, president of Manteca-based trucking company Mountain Valley Express and president of the California Trucking Association.

"\$1 an hour - can I plug my house into that?" Blevins joked. "Whenever we can save fuel, that's a good thing."

It's not the only cleanup effort at truck stops. Another company, IdleAir, has produced a hoselike vent that fits into truckers' windows, offering them heating and cooling as well as electrical outlets and phone ports. That technology is already in place at a truck stop in Ripon.

New Flag City electric hookups save money, help environment

By Ross Farrow

Lodi News Sentinel, Friday, Aug. 10, 2012

Truckers who want to use their microwave, coffee pot, laptop or other electrical equipment have needed to have their vehicle engine on in order to access electricity whenever they stop for a break.

But if they stop at the Flying J truck stop in Flag City, they can now plug into a system on the Thornton Road side of the truck stop. Air pollution regulators and truckers alike say they're excited about their ability to reduce emissions and save money at the same time.

Flying J, just east of Interstate 5, is one of 50 locations that will have the electrical plug-in system by the end of the year, said Alan Bates, marketing vice president for Shorepower Technologies, which is being paid with U.S. Department of Energy funds to install the plug-in stations. The Department of

Energy is spending more than \$20 million throughout the country to promote the use of the electrical systems as an alternative to idling truck engines during rest periods.

More than 30 such stations have been installed at the Flag City truck stop. They began operation on Thursday, allowing truckers to shut off their engines when stopping for a nap or meal.

"It's an idea whose time has come," Bates said at a dedication ceremony Thursday afternoon. "This will be as commonplace as the wireless Internet."

Almost 50 percent of the time a truck is in operation is with the engine idling, according to Samir Sheikh of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"Idling costs a lot of extra wear and tear on the engine," Sharon Banks, CEO of Cascade Sierra Solutions, a nonprofit organization from Eugene, Ore., that will administer the project.

The new system also offers a significant reduction in emissions and noise, Banks said.

The truck stop is offering electrical truck parking as part of the federally funded Shorepower Truck Electrification Project, which will install plug-in stations at more than 50 truck stops across the nation by the end of 2012, according to Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, based in Modesto.

While I-5 will have several electric plug-in systems, the Highway 99 corridor isn't so fortunate. The closest electrical plug-in system on Highway 99 is in Fresno.

Lodi City Councilman Larry Hansen said that the new system will keep the air cleaner and reduce greenhouse gases.

Electricity project at a glance

Cost to trucker: \$1 per hour for electricity to heat or cool the cab and use computers, medical devices and other items.

Cost under old system: \$4 per hour for fuel, plus maintenance costs. A heavy duty engine consumes about 1 gallon of diesel fuel per hour.

Adapter: Truckers must purchase an adapter that will allow them to hook up at Flying J and other locations. They will be offered free today at Flying J from noon to 6 p.m.

What if a trucker can't make it today?: Walk into Flying J, and they will contact a mobile installer.

More information: Visit www.plugintosavings.org.

Lodi power plant to bring fast, clean energy for BART, MID, others

By Max Ehrenfreund and John Holland
Modesto Bee, Sunday, Aug. 12, 2012

LODI -- A power plant dedicated Friday will help pump water across the state, run Bay Area commuter trains and supply the Modesto Irrigation District and other utilities.

The 300-megawatt plant, fueled by natural gas, will be the most efficient in the north state, according to the Northern California Power Agency.

Its member utilities and other partners invested \$400 million in the plant, which uses a fuel that — for now — is cheap, and burns it in a way that cuts down on air pollution.

A third of the electricity will be used by the California Department of Water Resources to pump water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. This is the largest single use of power in the state.

An additional 6.6 percent will go to the Bay Area Rapid Transit District. The rest will be split among 10 publicly owned utilities across the state.

The MID has a 10.7 percent share, or 31.7 megawatts. That's about 5 percent of what the district expected to generate Friday to meet heavy demand for air conditioning and other uses.

The plant design allows operators to respond quickly to changes in demand and will back up wind and solar power, which vary significantly in their output during the course of a day.

"Up until now, if you had a gas unit, it was either very efficient but slow responding, or it was fast to respond but very inefficient," said Robert Weisenmiller, chairman of the California Energy Commission. "This type of technology, where you have both an efficient operation but also a fast response, is a game-changer."

The state water department uses an average of 2,000 megawatts each day for pumping. About half of the power comes from its own hydroelectric plants, but the rest is purchased from others and includes electricity produced from burning coal, considered a major culprit in global warming.

Old technology, better use

The technology in the plant is not new, said NCPA general manager Jim Pope. "It's almost like you could go to Radio Shack and buy the parts," he said. "It's using the existing technology that we've had for a long time better."

The plant will emit about 800 pounds of carbon dioxide to generate a megawatt-hour of electricity, enough to power 1,000 homes for an hour, said Ken Speer, NCPA assistant general manager for power generation.

A typical gas turbine emits more than 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide in generating that much electricity, Speer said. An efficient coal-fired plant releases about 2,200 pounds.

The new plant has the fastest starting time of any natural gas plant of its size in the world, according to Siemens Energy, its manufacturer. Operators will be able to bring it from a standstill to full capacity in about an hour.

The Turlock Irrigation District last month started up a gas-fired plant off Crows Landing Road that also is valued for fast starts and the ability to back up the district's large wind project in Washington state.

Construction on the Lodi plant began in July 2010 and employed more than 300 people. The operating staff is 23.

The plant must be tested before it is ready for commercial operation, which is expected at the end of September.

No break from high humidity

Air quality unhealthy for sensitive groups today

By Mark Peinado, staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Sunday, Aug. 12, 2012

It appears the heat wave that has enveloped Tulare County as well as the rest of the Central Valley is nearing its end.

But that doesn't mean that the triple digits are leaving soon. Temperatures in the Visalia-Porterville-Tulare area are expected to range from 101 to 104 today and Tuesday, according to

WeatherAg meteorologist Scott Borgioli. As for the rest of the week, look for the highs to hover around 100 with an end to the triple digits occurring this upcoming weekend.

Sunday's high for both Visalia and Tulare ended up being 102 degrees, as the high humidity prevented the temperature from going any higher, Borgioli said.

"The problem is we have monsoon moisture in the area and the humidity levels rise. That's going to be the case for the next few days," Borgioli said. "There are going to be afternoon thunderstorms over the Sierras all week.

"Nobody will feel any appreciable relief from the heat until we see temps drop in the 90s at the end of the week. The humidity should decrease in the Valley and the air will dry out so it will feel a little cooler."

The excessive-heat alert that had been in effect the past few days expired on Sunday night. But people shouldn't relax when it comes to the heat, Borgioli said.

"Anything over 100 is hot," Borgioli said. "People should stay hydrated, do their outdoor chores in the morning hours, avoid any outdoor activities after 2 p.m. and never leave pets or children in a car unattended. Also, check on the elderly."

With the exception of a couple of days in August, high temperatures have for the most part been around the upper 90s and low 100s with the nighttime low in the lower 70s. The seasonal average for the Tulare-Visalia-Porterville area is highs in the mid-90s with lows in the mid-60s.

"For a good chunk of the month, we have been above our average temperature," Borgioli said. "What happened is the high-pressure system has been really strong. It's been persistent in the area. It started out in the Midwest and has moved westward into our area."

With the increased heat, the air quality has gotten worse. Air quality in Tulare County as well as the Sequoia National Park and Forest will be unhealthy for sensitive groups today. And until the high temperatures begin to dip under 100, the air quality will most likely stay that way.

Riverbank may settle mine lawsuit

By Kevin Valine

Modesto Bee, Sunday, Aug. 12, 2012

RIVERBANK -- The city may be on the verge of settling its lawsuit against Tuolumne County over the county's approval of an open-pit mine that would ship mined rock by railroad through downtown Riverbank.

Doug White, Riverbank's attorney in this matter, said the City Council is scheduled to take up the settlement in closed session tonight and he is recommending the council approve it.

White said he could not release details of the settlement, but said it addresses the city's concerns about long, slow-moving trains tying up downtown traffic; delays in response times for ambulances and fire engines; and the noise and dust from the trains.

The settlement includes the city's concerns about the potential for asbestos being present in the mined rock.

"I can't disclose (financial) amounts," he said, "but we're pleased with the amount that the city has reached ... to mitigate the impacts on the city."

Riverbank sued Tuolumne County in May 2011 after it approved the Cooperstown Quarry. The open-pit mine is proposed for 135 acres bordering Stanislaus County, about nine miles southeast of Knights Ferry.

Miners could remove as much as 56 million tons of crushed rock over 75 years. The rock would be used as railroad ballast, in road building and other industrial uses. Trains from Oakdale-based Sierra Northern Railway would haul the rock through Oakdale and Riverbank.

Riverbank contends that the county failed to conduct an adequate environmental review of the project's impacts on the environment, air quality, and public health and safety. The city contends that the county should have performed an environmental impact report for the mine, a far more extensive and expensive review than what the county conducted.

The city also sued Jack and Tricia Gardella, who own the 135 acres, and mine operator Resources Exploration Drilling LLC.

Two environmental groups — Friends of the Mother Lode and Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center — also filed a lawsuit against the Gardellas, Resource Exploration and Tuolumne County.

The proposed settlement would end all litigation.

"It does appear that the various issues have been resolved, and a final settlement is likely," said John Buckley, executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center. "However, that still depends upon approval by the various government agencies. The city of Riverbank and the county of Tuolumne need to take action before all parties will be in agreement."

Buckley declined to release details about the settlement until it becomes final. But he said it addresses his group's concerns, which include mitigating the loss of oak woodlands and wildlife created by the mine, greenhouse gas emissions and the increased railroad traffic.

Riverbank to recover fees, court costs

Resources Exploration Drilling managing member Patrick Embree said: "We are cautiously optimistic that we are close to wrapping this thing up."

Tuolumne County Deputy County Counsel Carlyn Drivdahl declined to comment.

White said the settlement includes a provision that Riverbank will recover all of its legal fees and court costs. He said they are \$185,000 for his law firm and the law firm of Somach Simmons & Dunn.

When the county approved the project in 2011, it included a provision that the landowners and mine operator would be responsible for the legal fees if the county were sued.

Embree said his mining company still is securing the permits and permissions it needs to operate; he declined to say when he expects the quarry to open. He has said the mine could employ about 30 workers.

The council will meet today at 6 p.m. in the council chamber, 6707 Third St.

New gas power plant to help cut Calif. emissions

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star and San Diego Union Tribune, Friday, August 10, 2012

LODI, Calif. -- California officials say a new natural gas plant will help the state reduce greenhouse gas emissions as it pumps water to millions of people and farms.

The plant that opened Friday will replace some of the coal-generated energy used by the State Water Project, which provides drinking water to 25 million Californians and irrigation water to 750,000 acres of farmland.

More than half the electricity that moves the water is generated by the state's own hydroelectric plants. The rest comes from other sources, including coal plants that are heavy emitters of greenhouse gases.

In addition to supplying the water project, energy from the gas plant will go to Silicon Valley, the Bay Area Rapid Transit system and several municipal utilities in Northern California.

Valley bakes in heat wave with no relief in sight

By Eddie Jimenez, staff writer
Fresno Bee, Friday, Aug. 10, 2012

Fresno might have dodged a record-setting heat bullet Friday, but don't start celebrating yet. The National Weather Service's forecast now calls for triple-digit temperatures to continue through next Friday -- a 12-day stretch.

That could bring a surge of heat-related illnesses, said Ted Semonious, a Fresno fire battalion chief.

"We haven't seen a significant increase in medical calls as of yet, but I do anticipate that," he said.

As a heat wave lingers, people tend to get dehydrated and their bodies wear down, making them more susceptible to respiratory and other illnesses, such as heat stress, stroke and exhaustion, Semonious said.

Valley residents should drink plenty of water, limit outdoor activities and conserve power -- even though California's energy agency called off a "Flex Alert" for this weekend, a signal that the state expects to have enough electricity to run air conditioners and ice machines.

Friday's high of 109 was just short of the Fresno record of 110 set in 1898, said the National Weather Service in Hanford.

It's the highest temperature in Fresno so far this year and was also recorded on June 17 and July 12.

A high of 109 is forecast for today, 107 on Sunday, 106 on Monday and 105 on Tuesday.

A big dome of high pressure will continue to hang over the region, said Jim Dudley, a weather service meteorologist.

Although the California Independent System Operator, which manages most of the state's power grid, lifted Flex Alerts for today and Sunday, people still should try to limit energy use during the day and turn off unnecessary lighting and appliances, said Denny Boyles, a Pacific Gas & Electric Co. spokesman.

"Conserve energy when you can, but be mindful of your health with these high temperatures," he said.

People should limit their outdoor activities if possible, said Dr. Susanne J. Spano with Community Regional Medical Center's emergency medicine department.

Those who have to work in the heat should take frequent breaks and drink beverages with electrolytes when they sweat profusely, Spano said.

"Sweating removes not only fluid but salt from your body, and simply drinking copious amounts of water can cause low sodium levels that can lead to dizziness, seizures and death," she said.

This weekend, four Fresno cooling centers will be open from noon to 8 p.m. The centers are:

- **Frank H. Ball Center**, 760 Mayor Ave.
- **Ted C. Wills Community Center**, 770 N. San Pablo Ave.
- **Sal Mosqueda Community Center**, 4670 E. Butler Ave.
- **Pinedale Community Center**, 7170 N. San Pablo Ave.

In addition, three of the city's four swimming pools will be open from 1 to 7 p.m. Airways' hours will remain 1 to 5 p.m. Admission fees will be waived.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District encourages people to sign up for its Real-Time Air Advisory Network, which will send text messages or emails on air-quality updates, spokeswoman Jaime Holt said. People can choose a monitor station closest to them, she said. The network is available at www.valleyair.org/Home.htm.

Triple-digit temperatures are clobbering much of inland California.

A possibly heat-related death was under investigation Friday in San Bernardino. A 49-year-old woman was found unresponsive on the ground next to her wheelchair on a street there Wednesday. She was pronounced dead at a hospital late Thursday, the San Bernardino County Sheriff-Coroner Department said.

The weather service has been issuing excessive-heat warnings because of the dangers of prolonged high temperatures, and cities such as Los Angeles also have extended the hours of senior citizen and recreation centers to give people places to keep cool.

Cooling centers aren't the only option for Valley dwellers looking to beat the heat. Today's forecast high for Pismo Beach is 67 degrees, said Gary Sanger, a Weather Service meteorologist. Visitors can thank the marine fog and the California current that runs along the coastline and brings cooler water southward, he said.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Friday, Aug. 10, 2012:](#)

The right move on gas mileage

After fine-tuning the rules for a year, the Obama administration is due next week to set mileage standards that will double fuel economy to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025. It's the right move that saves money for consumers, cleans the air and cuts oil imports.

But GOP forces - led by likely presidential contender Mitt Romney - aren't sold on the obvious good sense of this plan. Stepping in ahead of the White House, a Republican report claims the higher mileage rules were coerced from carmakers who needed federal bailouts. In June Romney said that as president he would review the fuel economy package, leaving mileage figures to Detroit to devise.

It's the wrong response to an initiative that began under President George W. Bush, whose administration first raised mileage requirements to the mid-30s per gallon. With technical advances and rising fuel prices, the Obama team took it further at a time when drivers are clamoring for an answer to \$4 gas.

The new wave of autos and small trucks comes with sticker prices that will be \$2,000 higher. But savings on gas over the life of the vehicle are expected to make up this sum. The high-mileage rule will cost \$192 billion in extra car costs but will save up to \$515 billion in fuel, according to administration research.

As the Bay Area emerges from two straight Spare the Air days, drivers should be mindful of emissions. Cars, SUVs, pickups and minivans account for nearly two-thirds of greenhouse gas emissions, and the proposed standards would shave this figure way down.

California, with the nation's dirtiest air and largest car market, played a special role in bringing the policy this far. Under both Democratic and Republican governors, it fought Detroit for the right to draw up high mileage rules that were later adopted by a dozen other states, paving the way for a one-rule national standard.

That goal - thriftier cars and trucks and a cleaner environment - is where the country is headed. It would be wrong to change direction now.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thur., Aug. 9, 2012:](#)

Wood burning in fireplaces might be limited even more

By Mark Grossi

Bakersfield and Fresno residents who enjoy using their fireplaces might have noticed a lot of wood-burning bans last year -- 56 days in Bakersfield and 68 in Fresno.

But if a proposed new air regulation passes this year, they may wish there were only that many no-burn days in future winters.

Burning bans would multiply under the new proposed threshold suggested by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Expect some push-back on the bans, which are part of a new philosophy for the latest cleanup plan for soot, diesel exhaust and other particles, called PM-2.5.

The district this week is expected to announce an Aug. 29 public workshop on the PM-2.5 proposals.

A new risk-based approach would focus cleanup-incentive dollars on the most dangerous pollution around the most people at the worst times of year.

PM-2.5, a winter air-quality problem, is considered more dangerous than ozone. Studies show health problems from PM-2.5 costs billions of dollars each year. The pollutant kills hundreds of Valley residents prematurely each year.

But air activists say the district's new approach puts rural, minority communities at a disadvantage, adding that air leaders will focus more on larger urban areas and not on the vast dairy industry. Dairy ammonia combines with oxides of nitrogen to form huge plumes of ammonium nitrates in the Valley.

District executive director Seyed Sadredin said ammonium nitrate is not as dangerous as fireplace soot and carcinogenic diesel particles -- especially in more densely populated places, such as Bakersfield and Fresno.

"We want to protect human health as much as possible as we work on improving air quality," said Sadredin.

Kevin Hall, director of the advocacy group Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, says activists support the idea of protecting the health of those who have the greatest risk. But he says the district's approach would not accomplish that.

He said, "A true risk-based approach would treat all at-risk populations of the valley equally, whether they live in the city or country, and seek to reduce all precursors of particulate pollution, especially ammonium nitrate from mega dairies and feedlots."