

Industry gathers steam

By ROBERT RODRIGUEZ, THE FRESNO BEE, July 30, 2003
Also published in the Modesto Bee

California could generate more than 200,000 jobs over the next decade if the state maintains its commitment to developing a renewable energy industry, according to a recent report by the Environment California Research and Policy Center.

Members of the organization and representatives of a Fresno solar energy company touted the 44-page report Tuesday, encouraging the state to stay the course on its renewable energy policy.

Several years ago, California mandated that utility companies produce 20 percent of energy from wind, solar or other renewable sources by 2017.

But the authors of the report note that reaching the 20 percent goal is not certain. And upcoming decisions between the California Energy Commission and the Public Utilities Commission could change the outcome.

Evan Paul, field organizer of the environmental group, said California's interest in new forms of energy is especially important to the Central Valley -- a region that could become the Silicon Valley of the renewable energy industry.

A previous report by the Great Valley Center said that the 450-mile-long region from Mount Shasta to the Tehachapi Mountains has the potential for cultivating new energy sources including wind, biomass, hydroelectric, solar, hydrogen and geothermal.

"Renewable energy technologies have the potential to grow California's economy and provide thousands of high-tech, high-paying jobs," Paul said.

The report estimates that if the state continues with its renewable energy policies through 2017, more than 200,000 jobs would be created with an average salary of \$40,000 per year.

Paul and others pointed to the explosive growth of the solar energy industry as an example of the public's interest and viability of the new technology.

Mark Luft, sales manager of Unlimited Energy in Fresno, said his company has grown 200 percent during the past five years.

"We used to put in a system every other month," Luft said. "Now, it's one a day."

Luft was standing Tuesday in an east-central Fresno neighborhood where six residential solar systems have been installed in recent years.

One of the most recent systems is on the home of Franz Weinschenk. With rebates and credits, Weinschenk spent about \$9,000.

Although his system hasn't been in place very long, Weinschenk is amazed at one important feature: When the system is producing more energy than the home is using, the meter runs backward.

Weinschenk is credited for the extra energy he produces.

"To me, the defining moment was seeing that meter stop, then start spinning backwards," he said. "That's when you know you are saving money."

Center: Valley an ideal home for renewable power efforts

By MELANIE TURNER, MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER, July 30, 2003

The movie and entertainment business is headquartered in Los Angeles. Textiles are at home in the Midwest and South. The technology industry is clustered in Silicon Valley. Renewable energy has not found a home -- yet.

The Modesto-based Great Valley Center thinks the Central Valley, with its sunshine and vast stretches of farmland, is the ideal place for such a hub.

The opportunity for renewable energy here is "unparalleled in the nation," J.P. Batmale said Tuesday, his second day on the job as the center's renewable energy program manager.

Originally from Northern California, the 33-year-old relocated from Los Angeles to Modesto this week to take on the center's latest mission: Free up barriers and otherwise find ways to make renewable energy projects economically feasible.

The valley and renewable energy are a good fit for several reasons, Batmale said.

For starters, the valley has a tremendous amount of renewable resources, from crops that could become fuel for ethanol or biodiesel to wood chips, straw and other waste that could be converted to energy.

"The valley also has a small and light manufacturing industrial sector that could begin making the machines and technologies that could be exported to other regions," he said. "That's not there in LA."

Environmental awareness also is a factor, he said.

"I won't say that Californians are more environmentally aware than anyone else in the nation, but there's an understanding that there are limited resources and that as a society we are putting stresses on the environment," he said.

Solar panels make sense here, too, since they work most efficiently in places where the sun is incredibly strong, he said.

A report released last spring by the Great Valley Center said factors such as these make the valley a potential leader in the development of new energy sources including wind, bio-mass, hydroelectric, solar, hydrogen and geothermal.

According to a report released Tuesday by the Environment California Research and Policy Center, renewable energy technologies have the potential to boost California's economy and provide thousands of high-tech, high-paying jobs.

There are plenty of examples of renewable energy in the region, said Great Valley Center Director Carol Whiteside.

Even so, she added, "It's never been organized as a cluster."

There's a fuel-cell manufacturing plant in Sacramento, a waste-to-energy plant in Modesto, and dairies in the valley working on biomass projects.

"Our goal is to facilitate the use of renewable energy throughout the region for three benefits," Whiteside said. "First, because it's a source of energy. Second, it helps clean up the air, and third and most important, we think there's a huge opportunity to create jobs around renewable energy."

Batmale spent about six years in Los Angeles, where he worked on a graduate degree in public policy, helped the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power develop the nation's largest green-power program, as well as worked for a start-up distributed-generation firm.

Under the green-power program, people in Los Angeles can elect to pay a premium to know that their power comes from renewable sources. Money that's generated pays for new renewable energy plants, he said.

When he left the department 2 1/2 years ago, more than 100,000 customers had signed on, he said.

Maree Hawkins, spokeswoman for the Modesto Irrigation District, said the MID always is interested in new technology.

"The surveys that we do with our customers show that they are interested in renewable energy, but they also indicate that they are unwilling, or perhaps unable, to pay for them," she said. "That's very real in this area."

Most recently, Batmale worked for RealEnergy, a company that employs distributed-generation technologies that put energy at the site where it is needed, he said. On-site solar or natural gas sources are cleaner and cheaper than energy from power plants, he said.

"People pay less for their electric bill, it's better for the environment and there's no nasty power lines," he said.

Cement plant agrees to pay EPA fine

By MATT WEISER, The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday July 29, 2003, 10:40:13 PM

The National Cement factory in Lebec has agreed to pay a fine of more than \$800,000 in a settlement with federal officials over air pollution violations and reporting requirements.

The settlement was announced Monday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The case began in 1999, after National Cement finished a \$40 million expansion aimed at nearly doubling production capacity. The expansion included some new pollution controls, but the company had trouble getting the plant to meet emissions standards for several years after it resumed operating.

According to the EPA, the company's own records show that since 1999, the cement plant exceeded hourly carbon monoxide standards more than 8,800 times, nitrogen oxide standards 695 times, and sulfur dioxide standards 275 times.

The company also failed to report its emissions to Kern County officials, EPA spokeswoman Lisa Fasano said, denying the public easy access to air quality information.

National Cement Company of California Inc. did not admit any guilt in the settlement, which carries a fine of \$838,396 and requires the company to file regular pollution reports with the county and EPA.

Fasano stressed that the fine is based on the number of times the company violated pollution standards, not on the amount of pollution emitted.

"We didn't have to require that they install emission controls, because they had already been installing them," Fasano said. "They were making modifications to their facility, and in doing that, they increased their emissions for certain things. What happened in some cases is that when they tried to reduce one set of emissions, they increased another."

Company officials could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

National Cement is owned by S.A. Vicat of France and the Lebec plant operates on property leased from Tejon Ranch Co.

The plant makes about 1 million tons of cement a year by heating calcium, silica and other ingredients in a giant kiln. The emissions from that kiln are the plant's major source of air pollution.

The plant lies outside the San Joaquin Valley air basin, so it does not contribute to Bakersfield's already bad air quality. But it has long been a leading polluter in the western Antelope Valley.

For years it generated extra concern because it burned hazardous waste to heat the cement kiln, but that practice has ceased. Tom Paxson, Kern County air pollution control officer, said the plant's primary fuel is now petroleum coke, an oil refinery byproduct.

After the upgraded cement plant resumed operating, the Kern County Air Pollution Control District agreed to issue a variance allowing the plant to temporarily violate local air quality standards while it worked to achieve compliance, Paxson said.

Even so, the district imposed its own fines since 1999 totaling \$47,630 for pollution violations beyond those allowed by the variance. These fines were imposed under the state Health and Safety Code, while the EPA's action amounts to a separate enforcement action under the federal Clean Air Act.

"It's important for people to understand that a cement kiln is a huge piece of equipment and all of them are custom fabricated. Each one is unique," Paxson said. "So it's very difficult to predict exactly what the emissions of the different air contaminants are going to be. Often when a new kiln like that is first started up, the emissions are different from what the estimates are."

Fasano said National Cement was able to "debug" the plant, and it now meets pollution standards.

AIR POLLUTION VIOLATIONS

The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday July 29, 2003, 10:35:08 PM

Aera Energy LLC in McKittrick was cited June 18 for failing to meet the NOx Limit.

AES Delano Inc. in Delano was cited June 19 for visible emissions exceeding 5 percent opacity limit for transfer points.

AES Delano Inc. in Delano was cited for a boiler stack emissions exceeding 70 percent opacity for a time period greater than three minutes.

Albert & Elaine Bogetti in Westley was cited June 7 for illegal burning of construction material on a no-burn day.

Almendros Twin LLC in Shafter was cited June 11 for an ag burn containing unauthorized materials. The burn was observed smoldering unattended.

Arvin Community Services Dist., Booster Station and Well 6 were cited June 5 for installing and operating non-exempt engines without authority to construct permit.

Bidart Brothers on South Lerdo Highway was cited June 21 for an illegal burn of garbage, rubbish, etc.

Big Valley Pallet in Turlock was cited June 24 for not having a permit to operate.

Bohm Environmental in Stockton was cited June 19 for failing to adequately wet material and failure to discharge no visible emissions.

Camilo Almaguer in Fresno was cited June 23 for burning without a permit. Fire escaped and burn led to combustion of illegal materials.

Cisneros Fiberglass Co. in Tulare was cited June 16 for VOC containing material canisters not stored in closed containers.

City of Arvin was cited June 5 for installing and operating nonexempt IC engine without an authority to construct to permit to operate.

Community Voices / Suzanne Bryan: Make bigger air impact decisions

The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday July 29, 2003, 06:25:09 PM

There needs to be more forethought to our actions to clean up our air. We need to stop the pollution.

For example, instead of high-speed rail, which will increase the population and, therefore, car traffic and air pollution, we should use the rails we have and add to them in order to piggyback trucks that come through our valley.

There should be no through truck traffic. There should be rail transit points at all valley entrances -- Tehachapi, the Grapevine, Paso Robles, etc. Trucks or their loads should be loaded onto rail cars and transported through the valley to their destinations.

This would also apply to all of our new and proposed giant distribution centers. Distribution companies should provide rail access at their plants and put trucks onto rail cars to be transported into and out of the valley.

The Board of Supervisors recently approved a major multiple distribution point project at the foot of the Grapevine for Tejon Ranch that is projected to bring in thousands more trucks per hour into our valley.

This is done in the name of bringing new jobs to our high unemployment areas. The unemployment in that area is a result of seasonal work that is the nature of agriculture. There will always be seasonal work and there will always be those who are out of work.

Supplying year-round jobs for these workers will not solve the problem. The current seasonal workers will take the year-round jobs, and will not be available for the seasonal work. A new crew of seasonal workers will have to move to the area to take those jobs.

Therefore, the pollution problem will be further compounded by more people moving to the area.

Our local leaders need to be more honest about their motives. If they are trying to create more jobs, then do so for the people who are already here. Don't create jobs that require more people to move here.

I can visualize giant Truck Stop of America-type facilities at transit points where trucks and their cargos can be loaded and unloaded onto the rail lines. These would be good sources of new jobs for the unemployed.

Our leaders also are suggesting that we have mandatory "no burning in your fireplace nights." If the air is so bad that citizens cannot use their fireplaces, then people should not be able to use leaf blowers, businesses should not be able to contribute to the pollution in any way, through traffic should be diverted and farmers should not plow their fields on those days.

It is ridiculous to presume that telling a very few people to not light their fireplaces actually improves air quality. If our air is so bad, let's make a big impact. Everybody needs to participate, not just fireplace users.

We have enough people already. And we certainly have more than enough pollution. If this means that we need new leaders to make better decisions then let's get them.

Suzanne Bryan of Bakersfield is a physician assistant at the Pixley Medical Center. Community Voices is an expanded commentary that may contain up to 500 words. The Californian reserves the right to republish contributed commentaries in all formats, including on its Web page.

Focus on renewable energy as state looks to avert another crisis

By DON THOMPSON, Associated Press Writer

In the Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday July 29, 2003, 04:55:07 PM

SACRAMENTO (AP) - California energy agencies want a fifth of the state's energy to come from renewable sources by 2010, which is seven years faster than the previous goal.

Power Authority head David Freeman said Tuesday that if by year's end the Public Utilities Commission hasn't begun requiring utilities to provide more power from renewables to meet the goal, he will ask legislators to give him that authority instead.

"We're going to see some renewable action in this state, one way or another," Freeman said while touting the jobs that could also result. "It's an important aspect of our energy plan," Freeman said. "The utilities need to be entering into long-term utility contracts that will support the financing and building of new wind farms and solar power and other renewable energy."

Utilities commission spokeswoman Terrie Prosper said there will be no need for the authority to seek a legal change. The commission, she said, already is working to ensure the state meets the renewable energy goal jointly set this spring by the commission, the power authority - known formally as the Consumer Power and Conservation Financing Authority - and the Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission.

The state's three energy agencies agreed to increase California's use of renewable energy to 20 percent by 2010, twice as fast as the previous 2017 target.

The power authority, created in the wake of the 2001 energy crisis, has up to \$5 billion in bonding authority to build, buy or lease power plants, or help private companies finance the construction.

In the short term, the authority has been urging the utilities commission to order utilities to build or contract for more emergency power plants to be used at times of peak energy demand, to help avoid the sorts of blackouts that rolled across the state two years ago.

Freeman's new challenge to the utility commission came as he backed a report by the private Environment California Research and Policy Center that said an emphasis on renewable energy would bring new jobs and technology that could ultimately be exported elsewhere.

"Clean, renewable energy has the potential to be the next Silicon Valley for California ... bringing thousands of high-paying, high-tech jobs," said the advocacy group's Bernadette Del Chiaro.

Chris Beals, president of A Solar Company of Sacramento and San Rafael, said he expects California could again lead the nation in developing new renewable energy technology and practices.

California's agricultural waste, wind-blown foothills and year-round sunshine make it an ideal place to develop industries in biomass, wind, hydroelectric and solar energy, said Environment California's Evan Paul.

"It definitely rivals the computer industry for the amount of growth we're going to be seeing in the next 10 to 15 years," Paul said.

Paul and a nonprofit group in Modesto said the San Joaquin Valley could particularly benefit from renewable energy projects that would bring jobs and offset air pollution contributed largely by agriculture.

The push to renewables already is speeding up, said Mark Luft, a manager for Unlimited Energy, a solar panel company in Fresno.

"We were putting in one system a month three and a half years ago," Luft said. "Now, we're putting in one solar system a day."

Associated Press Writer Brian Skoloff contributed to this report.

On the Net:

California Power Authority: <http://www.capowerauthority.ca.gov/>
www.EnvironmentCalifornia.org

Made in the shade?

Outlook is cloudy for a new record for string of triple-digit days.

By Mark Grossi
The Fresno Bee

(Published Tuesday, July 29, 2003, 5:39 AM)

It might rain on Fresno's torrid run at a record for consecutive 100-degree days.

Clouds today are expected to slightly cool down the San Joaquin Valley's largest metropolitan area, which has 15 days of triple digits in a row. Fresno's record is 20 consecutive 100-plus days, set 19 years ago.

The relief would be welcome across the Valley but perhaps nowhere as much as Fresno. Statistics show July heat has hit Fresno hardest, raising its monthly average temperature by almost 5 degrees -- strong evidence that more streets and more buildings mean higher readings.

And the more intense heat often combines with pollution from heavy traffic to incubate ozone, the main ingredient in summertime smog. The general area around Fresno is considered smog central for the Valley, which is among the nation's worst places for such air pollution.

So, will the city reach 100 today? Will it rain instead?

"It all depends on the cloud cover," said meteorologist Larry Greiss of the National Weather Service in Hanford. "The cloud layer appears to be getting deeper for Tuesday and Wednesday. There is a slight chance of a thunderstorm."

On Monday, the high temperature was 104. The predicted high today is 99 as the moist air drifts into the Valley from the southwestern United States.

If not for a 99-degree high temperature on July 13, Fresno would already have tied the record for consecutive 100-degree days. The temperature reached 100 degrees on the four days preceding July 13.

This is Fresno's warmest July since 1996. The temperatures are driven even higher by an "urban heat island" effect, said Allan Chen, spokesman for Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, a leader in research on the effect.

The phenomenon, commonly understood since the 1980s, occurs because a city's streets and buildings absorb more heat than rural or greener areas. Researchers have established the effect in many cities, including Chicago, Atlanta, Phoenix and Salt Lake City.

"Other cities in the Valley have a heat island effect as well," Chen said. "It happens because streets and buildings replace the green plants on farmland."

The heat island effect can raise temperatures 2 to 10 degrees above those in the surrounding countryside, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Combining the highs and lows for July, Fresno's average is 85.9 degrees -- almost 5 degrees warmer than usual. The next-highest increase comes in Bakersfield, which is almost 4 degrees above normal.

One way to fight the heat island effect is with lighter-colored roads, rooftops and driveways, Chen said. The lighter colors reflect heat to reduce temperatures, cut down air pollution and lower energy bills.

Another weapon against the heat island effect is greenery, said John Valentino, board member of Tree Fresno, a nonprofit group dedicated to establishing more trees in the city. He said trees not only lower the temperature, but they help fight air pollution.

"I would like to see all the canal banks and roadways lined with trees," he said. "There are studies that show trees have the ability to remove ozone from the air. It would be a real benefit, and I don't think people realize it."

Even with all the July heat, the area's air pollution problem is about on par with previous years, say officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Stephen Shaw, senior air quality planner, said the Valley has 14 violations of one-hour or peak ozone standards this summer, and the average is 13 in late July.

Compared to the South Coast Air Basin, which has 44 violations this year, the Valley is not having a bad year, though it is still in violation of federal standards.

Said Shaw, "There is a little more wind this summer, and it has helped."

[Letter to the Editor, Visalia Times Delta, July 30, 2003:](#)

Auto mall debate: Keep the 'Jewel of Valley'

Visalia has been called the Jewel of the Valley. One reason is the entrance to our city on Highway 198 West.

Most people I've talked to want to make it scenic once more and keep it agricultural. The Mangano brothers who are developers want to change all that.

They are planning a regional auto mall like Selma's to be located north of the airport on 198 and west of Plaza Drive.

It would take 70 acres of scenic agricultural land and cost an estimated \$85 million according to a Fresno Bee article.

It should be opposed for the following reasons:

The Environmental Impact Report, paid for by the Manganos, asks for "an amendment of the general plan to redesignate the site from "agriculture" to "service commercial."

The carefully designed General 20/20 plan was made to protect agricultural land, keep businesses together in core areas, and prevent such leap-frogging.

Our local economy is based on our country's agriculture, called "green gold" in sixth grade when my class studied California.

What other state grows more fruit for the United States than we do?

The next generation could be importing it.

It would hurt our local dealers who have put so much money into their present locations and who are not interested in moving to a new location.

According to the EIR map "Potential Auto Dealer Sites in East Visalia," 98 acres within the city is commercial land available for infilling, including Lover's Lane, plus 50 acres in the South McAuliff Street area.

The Manganos hope to have 10 competing dealerships at their site.

The auto mall is by the landing pattern of planes.

The Airport Land Use Commission had several concerns, especially from the glare from auto glass.

If this passes, it will lead to other businesses, even big stores, asking to locate there.

It is not true, as at least one City Council member said, that the county will have the tax dollars if we don't pass this.

The county's general plan also calls for protection of agricultural land. What about traffic?

The EIR estimates the "project will generate 12,871 trips per day." A new auto mall will cause more air pollution. Already our county is one of the highest in the nation for children's asthma because of it.

With prevailing westerly winds, we would be breathing even more from surrounding townspeople coming to regional center.

The EIR states, "Traffic generated by the project will result in a significant unavoidable impact on regional air quality."

Our water district claims our groundwater is too low. What about all those cars having to be hosed off?

The EIR states "project would not be likely to have a discernible effect on groundwater levels."

There could be 200 vehicles per dealer totaling 2,000, a lot of water when we are asked to conserve what we use.

Carl Schoettler, at a public hearing June 23rd, was concerned about all the supportive auto businesses surrounding present dealers who may want to relocate there, as well as other businesses such as restaurants.

He stated, "It strikes me as very naive to assert that no other uses will be attracted. (to the site)."

Is a gigantic Selma Auto Mall replica scenic?

Most Visalians I've talked to don't want it.

They want to protect what we have.

CONNIE FRY

Visalia