

Irrigation board OKs power plant in Ripon

Stockton Record - February 12, 2004

MODESTO -- Directors of Modesto Irrigation District approved a series of decisions Tuesday authorizing the development and construction a \$76.5 million, natural-gas-fired power plant in Ripon.

The board also agreed to finance the project with revenue bonds to be issued by the irrigation district as part of a larger, \$125 million bond package.

The board's action comes on the heels of a decision last week by the California Energy Commission to approve the plant, which will be built on a 12.25-acre lot at South Stockton Avenue and Doak Boulevard.

MID's next step will be to complete the design work, then get the necessary permits from Ripon and the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) and put the project out for bid, MID spokeswoman Maree Hawkins said Wednesday.

The goal is to begin construction on the plant by October and have it producing power by October 2005 or sooner, she said.

The turbine-powered plant will be capable of generating up to 95 megawatts of electricity during times of peak usage. One megawatt is enough to power about 1,000 homes in winter and roughly 300 during the summer.

The plant will generate power to help meet energy demands in Ripon, Salida and Mountain House, near Tracy, and to provide additional power during emergency situations.

The state Energy Commission exempted the power plant from the standard licensing process after studies concluded the project would not hurt the environment, public health or other energy sources.

Imports Rule List of Cleanest Cars

Honda's Civic GX is rated the 'greenest' in the U.S. in a study. Volkswagen's Touareg diesel-powered SUV gets the worst score.

John O'Dell, LA Times Staff Writer - February 10, 2004

Once again import brands dominate a list of the most environmentally friendly cars, but this year for the first time they also dominate a list of the most polluting vehicles in a study of 2004 model cars and trucks to be published today.

Volkswagen's diesel-powered Touareg sport utility vehicle gets the worst score, nine out of a possible 100 points, in the annual ratings by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. In all, seven of the 12 worst models are from Asian and European brands.

At the other end of the spectrum, the natural-gas-burning Civic GX from Honda Motor Co. is rated the "greenest" production car available in the U.S. It beat all three gasoline-electric hybrids on the market - two from Honda and one from Toyota Motor Corp. - because of natural gas' cleaner emissions.

No domestic brand earned a spot in the top 12, although Ford Motor Co.'s Focus sedan and station wagon models, which ranked among the greenest last year, slipped only a few places in the new ratings. They remain among the most fuel efficient and least polluting cars on the road, said James Kliesch, lead author of the study.

The nonprofit group compared all commercially available passenger vehicles in 1,700 engine and transmission combinations.

The study rated cars and trucks according to tailpipe pollution and fuel economy as well as pollution from auto factories and fuel refineries. Diesel engines, because they produce more pollutants than their gasoline counterparts, always rate among the worst performers.

Honda products traded places atop the green list this year, as last year's winner, the two-seat Insight hybrid, was topped by the natural gas Civic. That's because a new rating method gave the Civic a better emissions score of 57 points, the highest the council has awarded a passenger vehicle.

"Overall, we are seeing things getting marginally better" throughout the industry, Kliesch said. "But there still are too many" pickups and SUVs with poor fuel economy and emissions.

Kliesch also singled out the redesigned Toyota Prius, a roomier, heavier and quicker hybrid than its predecessor that marries a small gasoline engine to an electric motor and is rated at 60 miles per gallon in the city and 51 mpg on the highway.

While noting that trucks are, by their nature, dirtier than cars, the group found that some pickups, SUVs and minivans did pretty well. Among them: Toyota's Sienna minivan and Highlander mid-size SUV and Honda's CR-V small SUV.

Kliesch said he also was impressed by the GMC Sierra and Chevrolet Silverado "mild hybrid" pickup trucks from General Motors Corp., which are available only for fleet sales. The full-size pickups can shut down their gasoline engines when they come to a full stop and average 19 mpg in combined city and highway driving, Kliesch said.

Many trucks wound up on the group's dirtiest dozen, including two pickups and nine SUVs. The only car is the V-12-powered Lamborghini Murcielago. The bottom tier also has seven imports, including three from Toyota, whose V-8-powered SUVs gulp lots of fuel.

Honda captured the most slots in the top 12, with five vehicles. Toyota was second, with four models among the dozen best.

The council's annual ranking is available online at <http://www.greenercars.com> .

The lean and the mean machines

The best and worst 2004 vehicles rated as environmentally friendly by the nonprofit American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

The friendly Green score**

Editorial

Living without fires (Valley responds to air quality needs -- and the weather helps out.)

(Fresno Bee - Thursday, February 12, 2004, 6:10 AM)

The first season of restrictions on residential wood-burning in the Valley is nearly over.

What started with the bang and clatter of controversy has apparently progressed with little more than a whimper.

Officials predicted that as many as 25 days might fall into the most restrictive "no burn" category. To this point we've had only two.

Some of that has to do with luck. The winter weather has cooperated, causing far fewer stagnant days than is the norm for the Valley. When the winter skies go gray for extended periods, much more in the way of particulate matter -- the soot, dust and ash that plagues us in these months -- is trapped. Not as much of that has been trapped this year. That's a blessing.

There's more good news. It appears that people are getting it -- the connection between residential wood burning and the choking haze that often afflicts us.

The evidence is nearly all anecdotal, but it seems certain that a large number of people weren't satisfied with simply obeying the strictest letter of the new regulations, but have voluntarily chosen not to burn wood on days when the practice is merely discouraged. Good for them, because that's good for all of us. Here's another measure of how well we have been doing: On the two official no-burn days this season, the air district got more than 60 calls to report potential illegal burning (more than two-thirds from Fresno County). Fully half the complaints went unconfirmed, but among those that were, there were no repeat offenders. Thus no violation notices were written, and no fines -- which could run between \$50 and \$1,000 -- were issued. That's the best outcome. This isn't a revenue-raising scheme but rather a process of education -- and people do seem to be getting it.

One part of the system may still need work. On the two days when full restrictions were put in place, the air quality never actually got as bad as predicted. But there were nine other occasions around the Valley when the conditions did warrant a full ban in some areas, only they weren't predicted. Put that down to the vagaries of weather prediction, perhaps, but we hope the prediction methods can be refined after this first year of experience with the new system.

On balance, this is very good news. The air wasn't as bad as it might have been, and at least part of the credit goes to people willing to change ingrained habits for the sake of our collective health. Bravo.

LASTGASP

"We can't go on living this way.

And we won't."

The first season of residential wood-burning restrictions in the Valley is coming to an end, and the news is pretty good.

Letter to the Editor

Keep standby diesel pumps

Modesto Bee - February 12, 2004

Let's keep the diesel pumps. Changing diesel engines with new electrical motors would result in more air pollution and more energy problems, not less.

Lawmakers have been led to believe that farmers' "standby" irrigation diesel pumps spew a tremendous amount of pollution into the air and they should change them for clean-burning electric motors. Bunk! These pumps are used for occasional pumping and operate a small number of hours per year, not every hour of every day. The law is based on faulty information and should be rescinded.

It takes about three times more gas, oil or coal fuel to generate and transport electric power to an electric motor than the fuel used by a diesel engine. In addition, the peak electric demand caused by thousands of new large electric pump motors would require major increases in power plant capacity. Diesel pumps pose no peak loads for our electricity grid. What are these lawmakers thinking?

Farmers are taking an unfair beating in almost every area of air and water pollution due to misinformation, junk science, special interests, unsound laws and over-regulation. The net result with these anti-farming laws is lost jobs, higher food costs, more pollution, more regulations and higher taxes. Let's not regulate farmers out of business. Keep the standby diesel pumps.

JOHN A. PAOLUCCIO

Salida