

Fresno adopts policy of building green

By Jim Davis / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

The Fresno City Council committed the city last week to using what it calls "green" techniques such as energy efficiency, recycled building materials and alternative energy sources for new municipal buildings.

Council Member Henry T. Perea, who pushed for the policy, called it a big win for the environment and taxpayers.

"I'm just real happy and excited that we're moving in this direction," Perea said. "The council took a big step in establishing this."

The council voted unanimously for the policy. Several council members praised the move.

"I'm encouraged the city is headed in the right direction," Council Member Jerry Duncan said. Council Member Tom Boyajian voted for the policy but said the city would improve the environment more by reining in urban sprawl and requiring builders to do environmental studies when developing on the city's fringe.

"It's a little piece of the puzzle," Boyajian said of the "green building" policy. "It's a part of the puzzle, but not a very big piece."

Perea said building green means the inclusion of energy- and water-efficient technologies, adding alternative energy sources such as solar panels and using recycled building materials. Perea said he's familiar with one building in Austin, Texas, where storage tanks on the roof collect rain water for landscaping.

Fresno already has an alternative energy source example - the solar panels installed last year on the bus canopies at the city's Municipal Service Center at El Dorado and G streets.

The upfront cost of producing an environmentally friendly building adds about 2% to the price, Perea said. A 2003 study by California's Sustainable Building Task Force concluded that the average energy savings were 20% over the life of the building.

The result, Perea said, will be fewer tax dollars spent on energy bills and a city less dependent on fossil fuels.

"It will allow us to rely less on fossil fuel energy and forces us to focus more on renewable energy, which will help us clean the air and build a healthy community," Perea said.

Santa Monica, San Jose and Los Angeles are among the cities adopting green building policies. Gov. Schwarzenegger signed an executive order in December to reduce electricity usage at state buildings using these practices where possible.

The council last year had city staffers organize a task force of city employees and residents to study the issue.

The council's policy will apply only to buildings constructed for city purposes. The council could change course if construction costs are too high.

"That's why it's going to be important for the council to continue on our leadership role in looking at the long-term benefit rather than short-term cost," Perea said.

Sun Shines on Savings

Solar-panel estimate down but still up.

By John Ellis / The Fresno Bee

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Six months after solar panels were installed at Fresno's Municipal Service Center at El Dorado and G streets, the energy savings are exceeding the city's projections.

From July, the first full month the panels were in operation, through December, the average monthly Pacific Gas & Electric Co. bill for the 14-acre yard was \$13,060.89.

Over the same period in 2003, the average monthly bill was \$38,581.21.

Average monthly savings so far: \$25,520.32.

The numbers are vastly different than those stated by the city last month when announcing the panels had won recognition from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

At that time, General Services Director Ken Nerland said the average monthly Pacific Gas & Electric Co. bill for the yard before the solar panels were installed was \$238,000.

Since the system went online, Nerland said, the monthly bills were averaging \$49,000.

City officials now say an internal miscommunication resulted in the incorrect numbers.

"There was no intentional deceit, and we're making an effort to get the correct numbers out there," city spokesman Ken Shockley said. "When we make a mistake, we want to come clean with it." No incorrect numbers helped Fresno win the EPA recognition, city officials said.

The EPA honored the city as a member of the Green Power Leadership Club, which recognizes entities that make a commitment to generate electricity from renewable energy sources.

Even with the updated numbers, the city is on pace to save more than \$300,000 in the solar panels' first year of use.

It would be significantly more than the projected first-year savings of \$125,836, which city officials say was a conservative estimate.

Nerland is cautious. "To say we'll do \$300,000, I don't feel safe," he said.

Many variables can affect the month-to-month savings, said city Facilities Manager Dennis Major.

Among them: The upcoming fire season could increase the amount of particulate matter in the air - which reduces solar efficiency.

The panels also can become dirty, despite periodic cleanings.

Both expect the final savings in the first year to be below \$300,000, but above the city's initial projection.

Said Nerland: "Even with those variables, it's looking positive."

The city's 668-kilowatt system was installed on the bus canopy - a football field-size building - and several other canopies at the service center, where several hundred city employees work.

The cost was \$4.1 million, and an additional \$600,000 was spent on energy-efficient retrofitting at City Hall, including the installation of new lighting.

That brought the total cost to \$4.7 million.

PG&E is giving the city a \$2.06 million rebate, so net cost to city is about \$2.6 million. The rebate is one of the largest awarded by PG&E.

Nerland said energy savings from the solar panels and City Hall retrofits should cover the debt service on the 15-year, low-interest loan through the California Energy Commission that was used to fund the project.

News in brief

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2005

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. (AP) _ County pollution officials are stepping up monitoring of diesel exhaust in downtown Santa Barbara and Santa Maria.

"Diesel particulates are the No. 1 airborne carcinogen, according to the state Air Resources Board," said Bobbie Bratz, spokeswoman for the county Air Pollution Control District.

"The way they react inside the lungs can be more damaging than other particulates that you might breathe in, like dust and dirt," Bratz added.

The district recently installed new equipment downtown to measure the particles of diesel exhaust. By the end of the year, the federal Environmental Protection Administration will analyze the data and determine whether the county meets safe standards for diesel exhaust.

To reduce diesel pollution, the state this month began enforcing restrictions on idling trucks and buses. The new rules allow a truck to idle its engine for only five minutes when not at work. Buses may idle no longer than 10 minutes.

New regs will generate savings for consumers, regulators say

By STEVE LAWRENCE, Associated Press Writer

In the Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2005

SACRAMENTO (AP) - California's new greenhouse gas emission standards can be met largely by using existing auto technologies and will generate consumer savings by improving gas mileage, according to a state regulator.

"We're not talking about exotic technologies here," said Chuck Shulock, manager of the state Air Resources Board's greenhouse gas reduction program. "Significant reductions can be achieved simply by taking existing technologies and applying them very broadly across the (vehicle) fleet."

Shulock testified Monday at a hearing held by the Assembly Transportation Committee to determine if regulations approved by the ARB last September comply with 2002 legislation that made California the first state to require auto companies to reduce greenhouse gases that scientists say contribute to global warming.

The new limits, which will be phased in starting in 2009, are designed to cut emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from new cars, light trucks and sports utility vehicles about 30 percent by 2016.

A group of automakers and dealers is challenging the state's effort in court, contending it conflicts with the federal government's role in setting fuel efficiency standards.

The automakers also say the regulations would increase the cost of a new vehicle an average of \$3,000, about three times the top ARB figure.

But Shulock said the ARB's cost estimates were determined by the Martec Group, a company he said was also used by the auto industry to gauge the cost of new technologies.

He said any higher prices triggered by the regulations would be "more than offset" for consumers by improved fuel efficiency.

Roland Hwang, vehicles policy director for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said automakers have consistently overestimated the cost of emission control requirements in the past.

Automakers did not testify at the hearing and a call to the Washington headquarters of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, one of the plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit challenging the regulations, was not returned.

Assemblyman Robert Huff, R-Diamond Bar, questioned whether the regulations would be undercut by triggering a "performance shift" of motorists moving to heavier, more powerful vehicles.

But Shulock said the regulations wouldn't weaken vehicle performance. "We realized that if we'd come in here with a regulation that did that it would not be well received."

He also said the technological changes required by the regulations wouldn't boost repair costs. "If anything, some of them are simpler" technologies.

Some of the steps currently available include improved transmissions and cylinder deactivation, which allows an engine to operate on fewer cylinders when the vehicle carries lighter loads, Shulock said.

The author of the 2002 legislation, Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, said the regulations follow the "intent and purpose" of her bill.

She said Canada and at least eight other states are considering implementing the same requirements as California.

"It puts us again in a leadership position that people are watching nationally and internationally," she said.

On the Net: www.assembly.ca.gov and www.arb.ca.gov

Panel reviews cap on gas emissions

By Edie Lau -- Bee Staff Writer

Tuesday, February 8, 2005, Sacramento Bee

The Assembly Transportation Committee on Monday reviewed a state cap on automotive greenhouse gas emissions without much of the debate that has dogged the controversial rule.

All 14 people - mostly environmental advocates, business executives and the clergy - who testified supported the cap. Adopted by the Air Resources Board in September, it requires automakers to curb output of carbon dioxide and other climate-warming gases from cars and trucks sold in the state beginning with model year 2009.

Representatives of the auto industry are challenging the regulation in court and did not appear at Monday's hearing.

Several Republicans on the committee questioned how the regulation's cost was calculated. Air board staff estimates it will add \$1,050 to the price of the average vehicle by 2016, a cost that will be more than offset by savings in fuel expenses. The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers maintains the added average cost per vehicle will be \$3,000.