

Tracy votes down controversial bio lab But city agrees to back increase in testing explosives

By Jake Armstrong - Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Thursday, February 08, 2007

TRACY - The Tracy City Council voted late Tuesday night to oppose the University of California's bid to locate a federal laboratory that would research incurable diseases on a high-explosives test range southwest of the city.

The 3-1 vote came after months of the public - and even a few council members - prodding the body to take a stand on the controversial research lab proposal, called the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility. Vice Mayor Suzanne Tucker cast the lone opposing vote.

In a twist of irony, moments later, the council by the same margin voted to support an increase in the amount of explosives used in tests on the range known as Site 300, a 7,000-acre parcel owned by the U.S. Department of Energy and operated by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Councilwoman Irene Sundberg voted no.

Sundberg called it "unconscionable" that the council voted down the bio lab proposal and then backed increased explosives testing, which she sought to have declared a public nuisance.

"Are we flip-flopping around?" Sundberg asked.

Air pollution regulators in December gave Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory approval to more than triple the amount of explosives it uses in its outdoor tests at Site 300. The [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Hearing Board](#) was set Wednesday to hear an appeal of the permit, which allows the laboratory to use 350 pounds of explosives a day and up to 8,000 pounds a year. However, the board voted to continue the hearing to next month in order to handle a request for public documents.

Though the Tracy council does not have jurisdiction over Site 300, which is just outside city limits, the city's opposition to the bio lab will be put into a letter to U.S. Department of Homeland Security officials who are evaluating more than a dozen proposals from universities and laboratories seeking to win the facility. The lab would also research incurable pathogens in an area of the strictest containment level, or Bio-Safety Level 4.

Tracy resident Ed Burnell gave the council three reasons to oppose the bio lab: "Location, location, location," he said. Explosives testing, contamination and research into incurable diseases at Site 300 could cause an exodus of people who see the area as unsafe, he said.

"If we wait until we're on the short list (of potential sites for the lab), that's when you see the (for sale) signs going up and we have another crisis," Burnell said.

Mayor Brent Ives, a laboratory employee, recused himself from both votes involving Lawrence Livermore, his employer.

DHS officials have said the public's response to the bio lab proposals will factor into the final decision.

"We're not really at a position to define how much that public support will weigh into the final decision," DHS spokesman Christopher Kelly said.

But a convergence of support from state, county and local governments helped whittle down an initial 29 sites to the 18 under consideration today, Kelly said. Other factors that will influence the final decision are a local work force with experience running high-level bio-safety labs and access to multiple forms of transportation from the site, Kelly said.

Vice Mayor Tucker said Wednesday she feared the council's stance against the bio lab may deter DHS officials from talking with the city during its lengthy decision-making process.

Residents who have voiced their opposition to the bio lab outnumber those who have spoken in support. However, Tucker said she believes the response is born from fear, not knowledge.

"The more you read and the more you talk to people and the more you hear about it, there's so much security," Tucker said.

The 18 contenders for the bio lab face a Feb. 16 deadline to submit more information on their proposals to DHS, which plans to visit the sites and make final recommendations sometime from March to May.

Environmental impact studies on a short list of sites will begin in July, with a finalist being named in October 2008. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2010, and the bio lab is expected to be up and running as early as 2013.

History to come alive in Allensworth

Allensworth to draw people from around state

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2007

South Tulare County holds a significant piece of African-American history.

It's Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park, and hundreds of people are scheduled to gather there Saturday to celebrate Black History Month.

The day will feature live entertainment, along with tours of the 21 buildings located at the state park, the site of the first African-American community established in California.

Victor Carter, president of Friends of Allensworth, a statewide organization that supports the park, said buses of people usually come in from the Bay Area and Los Angeles to attend the five events that the organization hosts each year.

This year, however, the outlook for this month's event is looking dim.

"We are in limbo right now because of the weather," Carter said. "But some will come, whether it's good or bad."

If it's raining and people still attend, Carter said, the event will still go on.

"For a lot of people who come this will be the first time they see the park," Carter said. "This event is very important."

Carter said first-time visitors enjoy the park and its history. But recently, some park supporters say the park's integrity is in jeopardy. In December, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors tentatively approved a proposal that would allow a Visalia landowner to construct two dairies within two miles of the park.

Supporters of the park say the dairies will bring odors, flies, and dust that would hurt attendance at events like Saturday's. A state agency has offered to pay the Visalia landowner not to establish dairies on the land.

State attorney Kathryn Tobias said talks between the Trust for Public Land, California, a land conservation organization, and David Albers, the attorney representing the Visalia landowner, have started.

The two sides are trying to investigate whether or not a deal can be made.

"If [Albers] is not willing to sell [the dairy rights]," Tobias said. "Then there is no point in trying to negotiate."

In an e-mail, Albers said Trust for Public Land has sent a written proposal for structure of deal on behalf of State Parks. A dollar amount hasn't been proposed.

"Mr. Etchegaray is considering," Albers wrote.

Carter said the Friends of Allensworth organization remains optimistic that a deal can be negotiated.

"The fact that talks are still going on is positive," Carter said.

MASSIVE EXPLOSION

Four workers injured in blast; fire destroys several buildings, cars

BY LOUIS MEDINA and STEVE E. SWENSON, Californian staff writers
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2007

ELK HILLS -- Three men watch as flames bellow from a ruptured natural gas line in Taft Tuesday. The rupture at Occidental Petroleum destroyed nearby structures and vehicles.

A massive fire at a gas pipeline rupture in Elk Hills that sent four workers to the hospital Tuesday afternoon was reduced by Wednesday afternoon to a relatively small flicker, officials said.

All of the injured worked for PSN (Production Services Network) at an Occidental Petroleum site and three were released from hospitals within a few hours, PSN spokesman Tony Shelton said.

The fourth, Gary Puryear, was initially airlifted to Kern Medical Center and later transferred to the Frenso Burn Center where he was in fair condition Wednesday, hospital officials confirmed. His wife, Viola Puryear, said he suffered first- and second-degree burns on his back.

The other three, identified by the Kern County Fire Department as Sam Morris, Richard Thompson and Gordon Hilton, were treated at San Joaquin and Memorial hospitals.

Zeffrey Lucas, President for PSN in the U.S, said: "Our thoughts are with our employees who have been affected by this incident and with their families. The health and safety of our people are our greatest responsibility. We will offer every support to Occidental to determine the cause of the event and to return to regular operations in a safe manner."

Kern County firefighters were on scene Tuesday and Wednesday at the blaze which began at 2:30 p.m. with a rupture in a gas pipeline that was part of a rack of gas pipelines near Gate 3 off Elk Hills Road, according to Susie Geiger, a spokeswoman for Occidental of Elk Hills.

Fire officials said there were seven pipelines in the area. It was unknown Wednesday what caused the rupture, officials said.

Field production facilities such as wells, compressors and a gas processing plant that fed gas to the lines were 95 percent shut down by 9 p.m. Tuesday, Geiger said.

An assessment of damage may take some time to determine, but much of the assessment wouldn't begin until after the flames are completely out, she said. No estimates were provided Wednesday.

Kern County Fire Capt. Benny Wofford estimated the flames would be out by Wednesday evening.

The fire burned into several small buildings - a singlewide trailer, an older structure made of wood and another small trailer - and several cars, destroying them all, according to fire Capt. Doug Johnston.

Shortly after the incident, Viola Puryear went to Kern Medical Center to see her husband, Gary Puryear.

"He was doing pretty good when I spoke with him," she said today.

She said her husband was working for Manpower, a temporary employment service that had sent him to the Elk Hills field where he was working in a trailer doing data entry, when the explosion occurred.

Viola Puryear said the couple's car was destroyed in the fire.

Wofford said one fire engine and a hazardous materials unit remained on the scene Wednesday to ensure safety in the area as residual fuels burn off.

He said the latter is there to monitor the levels of gas in the atmosphere but stressed there is no danger to homes as there are no homes in the immediate area.

Although "it's not a safe area to go into at this time until we can extinguish the flames completely," Wofford said, "at this point we look at it as a very stable situation as far as the fire department is concerned.

Kern County Fire Capt. Doug Johnston said 10 to 11 people were working at the site at the time of the explosion. Everyone was evacuated. Cal/OSHA sent two investigators from its Concord office to the scene, according to Cal/OSHA spokesman Dean Fryer.

The California Department of Conservation, Division of Oil and Gas district deputy Randy Adams described the facility as a gas processing plant.

Adams said that a division representative was sent to the scene.

Weapons station ready for next step, Navy says

By Tanya Rose

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, February 8, 2007

CONCORD - For three months, the city has been in a panic, worrying about the U.S. Navy stepping on its toes while trying to plan the future of the shuttered Concord Naval Weapons Station.

Now, some Concord leaders are breathing a sigh of relief.

The U.S. Navy announced late Tuesday night that it will "surplus" the shuttered Concord Naval Weapons Station, or formally deem it ready for the next step toward development and local planning. This is the statutory trigger point the city was waiting for -- now local leaders can begin the next phase of plotting future uses on the base's 5,170 inland acres, likely a mix of open space, housing and businesses.

The announcement came right after the City Council voted 3-2 Tuesday to deny a 90-day planning delay the Navy had requested so it could study an alternative land conveyance method meant to unload the base land more quickly to the Louisiana-based Shaw Group, a private company, in exchange for military construction.

"I'm not interested in helping the Navy find loopholes in the law," said Councilwoman Laura Hoffmeister, arguing that the Navy should have to stay on track with the more traditional planning process set out in the Base Realignment and Closure Act, or BRAC.

"I'm worried about our own risk of litigation if we deviate from that," she said.

Hoffmeister, Concord Vice Mayor Bill Shinn and Councilman Michael Chavez voted against the delay. Councilwoman Helen Allen and Mayor Mark Peterson voted to give the Navy more time.

Around November or perhaps before, military leaders began looking at the benefit of trading the land to Shaw, or perhaps another developer, in exchange for \$1 billion in construction of dorms, airstrips or other military facilities that are needed in this wartime age.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy Wayne Army said during a presentation to the council that the land exchange method -- never used by the Navy, and only twice by the Army -- would be a way for the Navy to get rid of the land "sooner rather than later," getting the land on to Concord's tax rolls.

The Navy is still looking into that Shaw option, but the city now has the green light to move ahead under BRAC, which has been used in base closures throughout the last decade or more.

Hoffmeister and Shinn argued that if the Navy had been given the delay, and if the Shaw proposal were to come to pass, the planning would become corporate-led rather than community-led.

"I don't trust the Navy anymore," Hoffmeister said.

Allen, however, argued that giving the Navy more time to study would be a good thing and wouldn't leave the city out in the cold the way some had argued. Either way, she said, the base will not be developed overnight.

"We're going to have a say, no matter what," she said. "And I have news for you, there will be lawsuits even under BRAC. There are always lawsuits, they're unavoidable.

"What's the rush?" Allen added. "We want to do this right."

Peterson said he wasn't taking sides but simply wanted to give the Navy more time for study.

"There is no conspiracy or horrible motive behind this," he said. "We've had delays already, and guess what? The sky hasn't fallen. We're still here."

Further, Arny said that even without the surplus determination, the city could have gone forward with its planning efforts. That includes looking into residential opportunities on the base for the homeless and other public uses.

"We do want this to be community-driven," Arny said. "This doesn't work without you."

However, those plans would have to be conceptual because environmental impact reports required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) can't be done until the surplus designation.

Hoffmeister said she couldn't understand how the community could create a blueprint for the land without first studying impacts of development -- traffic, habitat, [air quality](#) and other impacts.

"The Navy doesn't think the CEQA process can be done fast enough for them to be able to unload the land in a timely manner, but we were hoping to be done by summer of 2008."

"I don't understand why that's not fast enough."

European Commission plans binding limits on carbon dioxide emissions for new cars

By Constant Brand, ASSOCIATED PRESS
San Diego Tribune Wed., February 7, 2007

BRUSSELS, Belgium – The European Commission proposed binding rules Wednesday to force automakers to cut carbon dioxide emissions from new cars sold in the European Union by 2012, arguing the tough measure was crucial for fighting global warming.

The plan faces strong opposition from the auto industry, and EU officials acknowledged it would likely lead to a rise in the sale price of new cars.

It foresees lower emissions limits of nearly 210 grams of carbon dioxide per mile for new cars sold or imported into the EU by 2012. Average emissions are now around 260 grams per mile.

EU Industry Commissioner Guenter Verheugen urged governments to offer subsidies and tax rebates to buyers who seek out more environment-friendly cars.

"We have to be clear about this, this is something which would considerably increase manufacturing costs per car," he said, but added that extra costs "will be more than balanced by the fact that cars will have greater fuel efficiency."

The plan also calls for increased use of biofuels and cleaner fossil fuels, meant to reduce car emissions by 25 percent, even lower than the 210-gram objective, EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said. It also calls for added research to get a 153-gram-per-mile level by 2020.

"If action is delayed, it will cost far more," Dimas said.

He pointed to a U.N. scientist panel report Friday that warned that global warming was so severe that it would continue for centuries.

"Winning the battle to prevent dangerous climate change ... will require very substantial reductions of greenhouse gases. All sectors of the economy should participate and transport is very important," he said.

The United States does not regulate carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles, although the government and several states are looking into proposals, said John Millett, a spokesman for the Environmental Protection Agency.

California has adopted a plan, which the auto industry has challenged in a lawsuit, for incremental decreases in carbon dioxide emissions, beginning with cars made in 2009. Cars and light trucks made that year would be limited to 323 grams of carbon dioxide per mile. By 2016, that figure would drop to 205 grams per mile, a 30 percent reduction over cars made in 2002.

EU officials argued the new rules, if backed by EU governments, would keep Europe's ailing car industry viable in the long-term, amid growing cheap imports from Asia.

"The EU car industries are at the core of our economies," said EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso. "By positively taking up the climate change challenge, they will preserve and enhance their competitiveness in the long term."

Barroso is pushing EU governments to shift the 27-nation bloc to a low carbon economy as a way of tackling global warming and carving out a new industrial niche for European industries.

EU officials have said automakers have failed to meet voluntary caps on car emissions set with the commission nine years ago, when they pledged to reduce average emissions from new and imported cars to 225 grams of carbon dioxide per mile by 2008.

Although emissions have been falling, EU officials say they have not gone far enough. However, original plans pushed by Dimas were watered down amid heavy lobbying from the car industry and Germany, home to Volkswagen, DaimlerChrysler and BMW.

Dimas had called for a 193-gram-per-mile limit by 2012, but was opposed by Industry Commissioner Guenter Verheugen and the car makers. German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel welcomed the new plan as an "ambitious goal, by which Europe will become a worldwide pioneer."

The auto industry called the new plan "unbalanced and damaging" to the EU's economy, putting at risk 12 million jobs, and said other industries should also play a part in cutting emissions.

The European car manufacturers' association, ACEA, argued consumers were interested in bigger, safer cars, pointing to figures showing that small, fuel-efficient cars are not selling. The ACEA said the new carbon cuts would add at least \$3,896 to the price.

"The ideas put forward ... focus too much on vehicle technology, denying the fact that a broad range of means is available to reduce CO2 emissions in a far more cost-effective way," said Sergio Marchionne, president of ACEA and CEO of FIAT Group.

But Jos Dings, of the environmental lobby European Federation for Transport and Environment, said new proposal did not go far enough. He said the lowered target will lead to 100 million tons of additional carbon dioxide emissions between 2012 to 2020.

"Not only is the car industry failing on its voluntary commitment to cut CO2 emissions, the commission now wants to reward this failure with a weaker fuel-efficiency target," he said.

Along with the stringent new emissions limit, set to be drafted later this year, rules would be introduced to cut red tape and simplify safety and technical regulations for manufacturers. That would include new rules on developing cleaner engines, minimum standards on air conditioning units, and better traffic management rules by EU countries.

Car manufacturers would also be asked to sign an "EU code of good practice" to ensure they promote their products on fuel efficiency rather than size and power.

EU officials said road transport accounts for about one fifth of the EU's carbon dioxide emissions, with passenger cars responsible for 12 percent alone. They said carbon emissions from road transport rose 26 percent between 1990 and 2004.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2007:](#)

We can do better

Bush's proposal on fuel economy standards is muddled, indefinite.

The energy proposals that President Bush offered last month in his State of the Union message are, in some cases, modest steps in the right direction. On the whole, however, they generally are disappointing and don't put enough stress on greater energy conservation.

Bush's proposal to raise fuel economy standards is too muddled and indefinite, particularly considering that he has foolishly neglected during the first six years of his presidency to support substantially higher standards.

While commendably urging that America attempt to reduce gasoline consumption by 20% within 10 years, the president appears to be overrelying on corn-based ethanol as an alternative fuel to achieve that goal. There are limitations as to how much corn America can feasibly produce, and it is in heavy demand as a food product for humans and livestock. Furthermore, ethanol production consumes considerable amounts of fossil fuel. ...

The current fuel economy standard requiring car fleets to average 27.5 miles per gallon was put in place in 1985. Since then, technological improvements have greatly increased engine efficiency and made higher standards eminently feasible. ...

We have urged that CAFE standards be raised by five to 10 mpg over a decade, which vehicle manufacturers could achieve merely with existing technology.

Bush also is urging that, by 2017, America replace 35 billion gallons of gasoline annually (about 15% of projected gasoline use) with renewable or alternative fuels. That would be seven times the amount of ethanol produced in 2006.

By one estimate, the U.S. corn crop would have to more than triple in size to enable the production of 35 billion gallons of corn-based ethanol annually. The diversion of corn for ethanol

already is alarming livestock producers and makers of food products who are heavy corn users. A recent article in Business Week magazine also cautioned that a too-heavy mix of ethanol with gasoline could corrode existing service station pumps. ...

We generally have agreed with Bush that the United States should attempt to increase domestic oil and natural gas production to help reduce our reliance on foreign oil.

But America's biggest need is for increased energy conservation and efficiency, coupled with development of alternative energy technologies ranging from wind power to plug-in hybrid vehicles and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

The president still isn't focusing enough on those forward-looking approaches.

[OC Register Letters to the Editor Wed., Feb. 6, 2007](#)

Global warming theory: emphasis on 'global'

Congratulations to the Register for its editorial, "Apocalypse hardly" [Commentary, Feb. 4], that courageously stands up to "the end of the Earth is near" hysteria based on some other media's reading of the recent United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report on global warming.

Assuming that this recent report is right, and CO2 and a few other gases produced by the world's countries are driving the Earth's recent warming trend, one has to ponder whether the world's CO2 emissions can be controlled.

The Energy Information Administration's July 2006 data, which reports CO2 emissions by country for the 25-year period 1980-2004, shows some fascinating trends.

The total world CO2 emissions increase is the highest ever in the past two years of this period. Increases of CO2 emissions occur in all seven regions of the world. No region on Earth is reducing its CO2 emissions levels.

Europe's CO2 emissions increased about 30 percent more than in the U.S. during the past two years despite Europe's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol. Eurasia's (former U.S.S.R. countries) CO2 emissions increased about 40 percent more than in the U.S. for the past two years. The 1990s economic collapse in Eurasia drove most of the CO2 reductions claimed by Kyoto proponents. Eurasia is now in economic recovery, and the most recent CO2 emissions data show this clearly.

More than 50 percent of the increase in world CO2 emissions in the period 2003-04 occurred in China. This is an increase of more than 1.4 billion metric tons per year of increased CO2 emissions. More than two-thirds of the world's CO2 emissions increase in 2003-04 occurred from the Asian and Oceania-region countries.

The effort required to stop the level of increase in CO2 emissions will be daunting, let alone efforts hoped for by some, which would reduce present CO2 emissions levels.

If the recent IPCC report is right about CO2 driving global warming and in view of the most recent Environmental Impact Assessment CO2 emissions data, it seems that as much effort is required thinking through ways to accommodate global warming impacts in addition to thinking through ways to address global warming gas emissions levels.

Larry Hamlin
Dana Point

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This global warming debate is getting to be hilarious, more juicy meat for Jay Leno and others ["Mankind blamed for global warming" Front page, Feb. 2]. These advocates say that burning fossil fuel is the greatest contributor to warming, and what's really crazy about this U.N. news release is that they are not sure, they say it is "very likely."

Don't you think one should be sure about what one is advocating. Everybody knows that the sun is our source of heat. If it decides to be hotter for a while (an act of God), there is nothing we can do about it.

D.G. Ronglien
La Mirada

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The Register and its contributors are obstinate. Ninety percent of the world's scientists have told us that global warming is happening, due to human activity (fossil-fuel burning). In response, the Register publishes columnist Mark Steyn, who labels everyone who proclaims global warming as fact as some kind of kook ["Eco-chondriacs crank up the hysteria," Commentary, Feb. 4].

Steyn cites no scientific fact, but relies on irrelevancies and sham arguments. The problem is, Steyn and the Register aren't going to have to suffer the consequences of the global warming. The ones who will suffer are the unborn fetuses whose rights the Register is so wont to protect.

Robert McEwen
Cypress