

Fresno rendering plant odor fuels new debate

By George Hostetter

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, Aug. 23, 2009

A new debate has begun over a 56-year-old rendering plant that west Fresno activists say is ruining their quality of life with the overpowering smell of rotting animals.

The plant's top executive said recent plant upgrades have all but eliminated the foul odors and, just as importantly, the operation has a legal right to stay and continue its pivotal role in the local economy.

But questions about whether the plant needs a conditional-use permit have revived community concerns -- and City Hall must find a solution.

At issue is the rendering plant on West Belgravia Avenue owned by Texas-based Darling International Inc.

The plant is authorized to process daily about 850,000 pounds of dead animals and animal parts into byproducts such as poultry feed and tallow.

The plant employs about 50 people, with union-scale wages and benefits. It performs a service as vital to a functioning society as any plumber or electrician.

The Valley's huge slaughtering operations, with more than 4,000 employees total, depend on Darling's plant for their survival.

The plant moved to its current location in 1953, when the site was in Fresno County, at the behest of government agencies intent on economic progress. The city of Fresno willingly annexed the plant some 20 years later, and just as willingly permitted residential growth to brush against the plant's edge.

But Mary Curry, chairwoman of Concerned Citizens of West Fresno, says the odor of such labor too often permeates nearby homes, sickening residents.

"It's a smell that stays with you," Curry said. "It gets in your nostrils and won't go away. It's nauseating.

"We don't dispute that what they [Darling] do is important," Curry said. "They just need to be doing it someplace else, not in the heart of a community."

Randall Stuewe, Darling's chief executive, said in written statements last week that the company has spent nearly \$10 million in the past seven years on modernizing its Fresno plant into a state-of-the-art facility.

Stuewe said Darling plays by the rules, and should be treated as a valued corporate citizen of Fresno: "The facility has all the necessary permits to operate within the city, the county and the state."

City officials have scheduled a meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Hinton Community Center, where they will listen to residents' concerns, answer questions and present the results of a 361-page report on the rendering plant's operations written by a private consulting firm hired by the city.

"Our goal is to make sure [west Fresno residents] understand the factual report we've created so we can all pull from that report in making our decisions," says Keith Bergthold, interim director of the city's planning department.

Curry says she believes the Darling plant is operating illegally because it doesn't have a conditional-use permit, a legal tool that sets conditions for a business to operate.

Curry points to a five-page letter written last year by then-planning department director Nick Yovino to Jeff Reid, a Fresno lawyer representing Darling and a former Fresno city manager. Yovino concluded that the plant needed to apply for a permit.

Darling officials disagreed, and in August 2008 Stuewe told the City Council as much in person. Stuewe said a permit would put Darling "at risk of legal challenge."

Bergthold on Friday said City Hall is no longer interested in requiring a permit for Darling's rendering plant.

Bergthold said he couldn't discuss why, saying his department got its marching orders from the council and the City Attorney's Office during a closed-door meeting.

Bergthold said his department was told to draft a "nuisance-abatement agreement" with Darling officials.

The Bakersfield consulting group's report is one step in that direction, he said.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce seeks trial on global warming

The business lobby, hoping to fend off potentially sweeping emission limits, wants the EPA to hold a 'Scopes'-like hearing on the evidence that climate change is man-made.

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2009

August 25, 2009

Reporting from Washington - The nation's largest business lobby wants to put the science of global warming on trial.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, trying to ward off potentially sweeping federal emissions regulations, is pushing the Environmental Protection Agency to hold a rare public hearing on the scientific evidence for man-made climate change.

Chamber officials say it would be "the Scopes monkey trial of the 21st century" -- complete with witnesses, cross-examinations and a judge who would rule, essentially, on whether humans are warming the planet to dangerous effect.

"It would be evolution versus creationism," said William Kovacs, the chamber's senior vice president for environment, technology and regulatory affairs. "It would be the science of climate change on trial."

The goal of the chamber, which represents 3 million large and small businesses, is to fend off potential emissions regulations by undercutting the scientific consensus over climate change. If the EPA denies the request, as expected, the chamber plans to take the fight to federal court.

The EPA is having none of it, calling a hearing a "waste of time" and saying that a threatened lawsuit by the chamber would be "frivolous."

EPA spokesman Brendan Gilfillan said the agency based its proposed finding that global warming is a danger to public health "on the soundest peer-reviewed science available, which overwhelmingly indicates that climate change presents a threat to human health and welfare."

Environmentalists say the chamber's strategy is an attempt to sow political discord by challenging settled science -- and note that in the famed 1925 Scopes trial, which pitted lawyers Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan in a courtroom battle over a Tennessee science teacher accused of teaching evolution illegally, the scientists won in the end.

The chamber proposal "brings to mind for me the Salem witch trials, based on myth," said Brenda Ekwurzel, a climate scientist for the environmental group Union of Concerned Scientists. "In this case, it would be ignoring decades of publicly accessible evidence."

In the coming weeks, the EPA is set to formally declare that the heat-trapping gases scientists blame for climate change endanger human health, and are thus subject to regulation under the Clean Air Act. The so-called endangerment finding will be a cornerstone of the Obama administration's plan to set strict new emissions standards on cars and trucks.

The proposed finding has drawn more than 300,000 public comments. Many of them question scientists' projections that rising temperatures will lead to increased mortality rates, harmful pollution and extreme weather events such as hurricanes.

In light of those comments, the chamber will tell the EPA in a filing today that a trial-style public hearing, which is allowed under the law but nearly unprecedented on this scale, is the only way to "make a fully informed, transparent decision with scientific integrity based on the actual record of the science."

Most climate scientists agree that greenhouse gas emissions, caused by the burning of fossil fuels and other human activities, are warming the planet. Using computer models and historical temperature data, those scientists predict the warming will accelerate unless greenhouse gas emissions are dramatically reduced.

"The need for urgent action to address climate change is now indisputable," said a recent letter to world leaders from the heads of the top science agencies in 13 of the world's largest countries, including the head of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences.

The EPA's endangerment finding for greenhouse gases, as proposed in April, warned that warmer temperatures would lead to "the increased likelihood of more frequent and intense heat waves, more wildfires, degraded air quality, more heavy downpours and flooding, increased drought, greater sea level rise, more intense storms, harm to water resources, harm to agriculture, and harm to wildlife and ecosystems."

Critics of the finding say it's far from certain that warming will cause any harm at all. The Chamber of Commerce cites studies that predict higher temperatures will reduce mortality rates in the United States.

[Letter to the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, August 25, 2009:](#)

Clean air

I appreciated the Aug. 16 Times article, "Protesters march on Chevron refinery in Richmond."

Richmond has many forms of violence, and all violence must be rejected, including environmental violence.

As peaceful individuals marched against the potential expansion of pollution from the refinery, they chanted, "Clean air, healthy jobs." They, and their expressed sentiment, represent the strong desire of the majority of Richmond residents, organized labor members and community groups.

Most Richmond residents don't have the money Chevron has to spend on full-page color ads. Instead, we paint signs and take them to the streets, because we know the following.

Chevron still refuses to put in writing that it will not bring dirtier, more polluting crude oil to Richmond. Last year, the incomplete and insufficient plan was rubber-stamped by Chevron supporters on the City Council (Maria Viramontes, Ludmyrna Lopez, Nat Bates), after "They bypassed their city staff and negotiated details of the community agreement directly with the company" (Times editorial, Aug. 21, 2008).

Chevron was stopped by a decent judge, who sent Chevron back to fix the flawed EIR. Chevron is the only party rejecting California Attorney General Jerry Brown's offer of mediation.

Chevron pollutes too much already!

Jovanka Beckles, Richmond

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2009](#)

Cash for Clunkers was a big success

The Cash for Clunkers program has been a huge success story. We are getting a good return on our investment. The tax money spent on the clunker program is repaid by the sales tax on the purchase price of new cars and the states get higher license fees for years to come.

The best part is that when a new car is sold, it provides jobs in the automobile industry, including jobs in related factories and small businesses. These jobs generate state and federal income tax, plus sales tax on retail purchases made by these same employed Americans.

This helps to stimulate the economy by moving around money and goods. In addition, more fuel efficient cars help reduce our dependence on foreign oil and cut our carbon emissions into the atmosphere. And it is nice to drive a new car.

Willis J. Schell, Denair

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2009](#)

Letter: Half-baked idea

Editor: The article on the front page of the Sun-Star on Monday about the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District cracking down on charbroilers is another example of where a political result is more important than a scientific one.

The district claims the charbroiler exhaust threatens the health of nearby residents. They cite no evidence of this. If the district were really concerned about the effects of charbroiling, they would have done studies on the people who have worked as food preparers in restaurants that use charbroilers.

Charbroilers have been around for years, so the long-term effects on the people using them could easily be studied and the results of the ill effects, if any, could be obtained. Rather than this, the district rushes to a conclusion not supported by the facts.

The next thing you know, the district will extend this absurdity to requiring all hamburgers and other charbroiled foods be vacuumed before serving to remove pollutants. The real pollution is all the junk science we're being fed.

David A. Bultena, Merced