

Air quality forecast and woodburning rules

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Sunday afternoon, January 24, 2010

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 1/24/2010: 19 Good (PM2.5)

School Flag color for 1/24/2010: Green

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 1/24/2010: Please burn cleanly

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Daily Air Quality Forecast

More information about the Daily Air Quality Forecast can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/forecast.htm>.

More information about the Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>.

Air impact fees clear last state legal hurdle

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2010

It looks like air pollution impact fees on developers are here to stay.

The California Supreme Court decided this week not to hear a building industry challenge to the rule, which requires developers to pay fees for the vehicle pollution generated by new projects.

Developers can reduce the fees in several ways, including building closer to shopping and offices, increasing street connections and building bike paths.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District -- which started the ground-breaking rule in 2005 -- hailed the court's decision as a win for San Joaquin Valley residents.

"Every penny paid by the developers goes toward paying for projects in the Valley that reduce emissions and improve air quality," said Seyed Sadredin, air district executive director.

Bob Keenan, president/CEO of the Building Industry Association of Tulare/Kings County, did not comment.

The rule is designed to encourage so-called "smart growth" -- development that cuts down on sprawl and creates a more compact, mixed-use community.

It's a concept that is fast becoming the norm, according to Kathy Cain, planning manager for Hanford. Cain expects that the next Hanford general plan update to generate greater density and more mixed-use development. State transportation funding will likely be tied to how well the city accomplishes that, Cain said.

She said Hanford has done a "pretty good job" of developing the center and avoiding too much sprawl, though she also noted Hanford's lopsided growth to the north and northwest.

The city also "tries to protect as much agricultural land as we can," she said.

Agricultural interests view the rule as a reasonable strategy in the air district's overall effort to bring filthy Valley air into compliance with key federal mandates. The Valley remains out of compliance for both ozone and fine particle pollution.

Agriculture, once exempt, has come under regulation in the last few years in categories ranging from waste burning to diesel engines to dust control.

"This is the same type of discussion that applies to the building industry. Anybody that is building is an indirect source. You have to go after all the sources you can," said Manuel Cunha, president of the Nisei Farmer's League in Fresno.

Cunha called more concentrated, mixed-used development "smart growth." "You get all those benefits rather than having to drive 25 miles away," he said.

Sun-Star fined by air pollution control district for not filing permits

By Jonah Owen Lamb

Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, January 23, 2010

The Sun-Star has been fined \$2,250 by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for installing upgrades to its presses in 2008 without filing the requisite permits.

The violation was discovered in 2009 after an annual walk-through of the facility by an air district inspector.

"The Sun-Star deeply regrets that this has occurred, and we are working to come into compliance as quickly as possible," said Mike Rocci, operations director at The Sun-Star. "Had I known about the requirement, we would have met it. It will never happen again."

Rocci became responsible for the presses after another Sun-Star employee was laid off. He said he wasn't aware of the oversight until the inspector told him about it.

On Dec. 16, the Sun-Star got a letter informing the company that the air district had received payment of the fine and that the case was closed. In the letter, the district said it considers the case settled and closed.

The air district declined further comment Friday

Meanwhile, the Sun-Star is waiting to be issued an "authority to construct" permit for its press upgrades.

Notification letters of the upgrade have been sent to all businesses, residents and schools within 1,000 feet of The Sun-Star.

Air District Clears Final Hurdle in Development Lawsuit

The Taft Independent, Friday, January 22, 2010

The California Supreme Court has refused to grant the state building association's petition to review a case won by the Valley Air District over a landmark regulation controlling development-related emissions.

The court ruled this week that it will not review the case, won by the Air District in 2008 and upheld on appeal in 2009. The suit, brought by the California Building Industry Association, claimed the Air District had no authority to regulate development and impose fees through its enactment of Rule 9510 (Indirect Source Review). The rule, adopted in 2005, imposes fees for new development in the Valley in order to mitigate related emissions.

The latest ruling is the last possible avenue of appeal for the state BIA.

"The residents of the Valley are the winners in this matter. Every penny paid by the developers goes toward paying for projects in the Valley that reduce emissions and improve air quality," said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer.

Rule 9510 holds developers accountable for air-quality impacts that result from building activity and also for air-quality impacts that result from the development's use. Developers have options for offsetting pollution through a variety of mitigation measures - for example, including bike paths, increasing energy efficiency or building new housing developments close to transit stops. Fees are assessed for pollution that exceeds thresholds established by the Air District. The Air District uses these fees to achieve off-site emission reductions on behalf of the developer by

funding clean-air projects such as retiring polluting vehicles and paving unpaved roads.

The Air District was the first in the state to put such a rule into place.

In a related matter, the National Association of Home Builders is challenging the rule in federal courts. The claim in that case is that the rule imposes an engine standard on construction equipment that is pre-empted by the Clean Air Act. That case is pending in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The NAHB lost at the trial court level.

"We hope that the national association will now join the Valley developers who have embraced this rule and become partners in our work for clean air," said Sadredin.

For more information about the Valley Air District, call a regional office: in Fresno, 559-230-6000; in Bakersfield, 661-392-5500; and in Modesto, 209-557-6400.

Embracing Sustainability

The Taft Independent, Friday, January 22, 2010

Sustainability has many definitions depending upon the author and his intended audience. For the City of Taft, we have defined Sustainability as aligning our built environment and socioeconomic activities with the natural systems that support life.

Sustainability is the term we use to show how Taft will balance the various interests and needs of our existing and future residents and maintain or enhance our quality of life. The City of Taft's "Vision for the Future" reflects our core community values and identifies the guiding principles to guide our growth.

In adopting our General Plan, the City of Taft is making a clear and definitive statement that good planning is crucial to the City's success. Our General Plan Guiding Principles include:

Conserve agricultural and natural resources

Create a vibrant, healthy and active downtown

Incorporate green and sustainable principles through the General Plan

Encourage growth in existing developed areas with limited new growth in undeveloped areas of the Planning Area

Promote attractive residential and aesthetically appealing commercial development

Create a positive business environment for new and existing businesses to locate and expand

Provide mobility, housing and job options for all residents of Taft

Diversify the local economy while remaining a leader in energy production and maintaining a strong petroleum-based industry

More and more communities are embracing sustainability and not just because they are trying to save the planet or do the right thing. Communities across the country are improving their financial well-being as a result of reducing their consumption of energy and water, or as Mayor Mary Hamman-Roland of Apple Valley, Minn. put it, "Green keeps the green in your pocket."

Some of the leading innovative communities are also finding that sustainability initiatives not only "save" money through energy and water conservation strategies but that sustainability measures can be economic engines. For example, Palo Alto, California has worked hard to embrace sustainability and has found that their image as a "Green City" has attracted business. Some green projects have created many new high-wage jobs. Phoenix, AZ is becoming known as friendly to solar energy providers.

In Kern County, CA the Tehachapi Wind Resource Area will generate \$45 million a year in new taxes and create hundreds of high-paying jobs when it reaches 4,600 MW by 2030. Also, the \$ 2 Billion Hydrogen Energy project in nearby Buttonwillow will generate 250 MW of Clean Energy,

1,500 construction jobs, 100 new operating jobs and several million dollars in annual tax revenues. In short,

Kern County is not only the oil capital of California but is also encouraging alternative energy projects that will create significant new revenue streams.

The City of Taft has embraced Sustainability and we are benchmarking to Kern County and other innovative cities like Apple Valley, Minn., Palo Alto, CA and Phoenix, AZ that are turning green initiatives into economic engines.

We are analyzing municipal solar generation proposals that will not only save the City of Taft on our electric utility bill but will also create jobs and assist in showcasing our community as a "Clean Energy" city. We are also encouraging alternative energy and/or renewable fuel providers to consider Taft as a great place to start or expand their business. We already have one alternative fuel (diesel biofuel) company in Taft and another is about to sign a lease agreement. We have a 100 MW Solar Thermal Project and also have several PV solar farms from 20 MW to 200 MW that are locating within our proposed Sphere of Influence (SOI). Our solar initiatives are expected to provide clean energy for the region, reduce or eliminate the City's energy bill and create hundreds of high-wage "Green" jobs. Taft College will offer real-life laboratory experiences to interested students that want to enter the alternative energy or renewable fuel industries.

The City of Taft is on a path to become a national model in regard to sustainable development.

Consider the following facts:

246 Square Mile Planning Area with a projected population of 68,018 with 86% of the ultimate population within the existing SOI and 91% of the Planning Area is planned for non-urban uses and will remain Agriculture, Natural Resources and Open Space!

Taft has a popular 1-mile Rails-to-Trail but can you imagine a 58-mile Trail Network that traverses through a 120-square mile "Green" zone that is protected and preserved by the Williamson Act, Habitat Conservation Plan or other land use conservation plans?

We are planning our first Historic Preservation effort with a ribbon cutting and dedication on March 17, 2010." The Pioneer Mercantile Building was constructed in 1926 and will be the temporary studio for the artist that will create the largest bronze artwork in the State." We expect the Oilfield Workers Monument to be a "Major Landmark" and create a destination for anyone interested in fine art and the beginning of a cultural renaissance in Taft!" We also expect several other historic structures to be "retrofitted green" with the adaptive reuse in a mixture of land uses that will create a special sense of place in the Downtown area.

We have also applied for grant funding to create 5th Street Plaza and other "Green" public gathering places (including a small amphitheater) that will accommodate multiple programmed events at the same time or one or two large events. We hope to have a portion of the public improvements completed in time for the Oildorado celebration on October 14 - 24, 2010 and the city's 100-year anniversary on November 7, 2010!

Taft was the First ClimateSmart City in Kern County and by joining PG&E's program; Taft neutralizes more than 1 million pounds of carbon dioxide each year (which is equivalent of saving 1,100 barrels of oil). All of our facilities are "carbon neutral" and we believe that Taft may be the "greenest" city in Kern County and one of the greenest in the State in a few years!

Taft will implement Green Building Policies that comply with the letter and intent of AB 32 and SB 375 including City-led energy audits, energy efficiency and conservation programs, and [San Joaquin Valley Air Control District](#) efforts to improve air quality.

Taft will create and implement water conservation policies and programs and recycling programs and opportunities. For example, Taft already recycles 71% of our municipal waste and we will not stop until we reach "Zero Waste".

Our wastewater effluent is recycled in a farming operation governed by an MOU. The farm lowers

our operating costs, creates a green environment and provides a small revenue stream.

Taft is implementing other sustainable development practices that promote a healthy lifestyle and improve the overall quality of life of all community stakeholders!"

We sincerely believe that Taft is a charming, unique community and a wonderful place to work, worship, raise a family and/or retire." New residents are attracted to our city for good reasons - a strong and expanding job market with plans to diversify the local economy by creating 6,000 new jobs, a very SAFE community with zero tolerance for graffiti, drugs or gang activity, a central downtown business district complete with historic structures that are being renovated for new business opportunities, excellent school system, active Parks and Recreation District, and other major amenities like The Fort, Oil Museum, Veterans Memorial Park and Honolulu Hills.

Taft is also fortunate to have a community college (Taft College) that is recognized for its innovation in the classroom, new ways of teaching by using technology, nationally recognized programs, exciting new facilities and a Master Plan and funding for a modern and sustainable campus. As Taft Mayor Dave Noerr likes to say "Taft College is a shining example of the future of Taft as a unique and innovative place that has embraced sustainability!"

Tulare County asthma outreach program educates children and parents

By Maria G. Ortiz-Briones

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Jan. 25, 2010

Alicia Lupercio didn't know that letting her granddaughter sleep with her dog could be a trigger for the girl's asthma.

But Lupercio learned that information and other facts about asthma after getting involved with the Kaweah Delta Health Care District's Asthma Outreach Project

Lupercio's granddaughter, 10-year-old Crowley Elementary School in Visalia fourth-grader Samantha Servantez, was referred to the project by her school's nurse. She was diagnosed with asthma two years ago.

The asthma outreach project was recently launched to provide asthma education in Tulare County thanks to two federal grants totaling \$195,000.

The goal of the new program is to raise awareness about asthma attacks so they can be prevented.

The project will operate in Exeter, Farmersville, Ivanhoe, Lindsay and Visalia and offers clinical-case management services, home visits to provide environmental evaluation and asthma education.

Project promoter Lydia Navarro visited Lupercio's home for the first time on Dec. 28 to conduct the environmental evaluation of the house.

During that visit, Navarro checked Samantha's room, kitchen, bathroom and living area of the house for possible allergens that could trigger her asthma. Lupercio was given a list of recommendations, which included no letting her daughter sleep with the dog.

Now the dog stays outside the house.

"Sometimes I feel sad and sorry for Cloe because she cries at night," said Samantha, who understands the reason why she no longer can have the dog in her room. "She would help me go to sleep."

Other recommendations included having an asthma action plan from Samantha's doctor, a peak flow meter that would measure the air that comes out of her lungs and a spacer to use with her asthma inhaler.

So far the project has conducted visits to 12 asthma patients and their families, Navarro said.

Maria Santillan's 11-year-old son, William Veliz, was also referred to the asthma outreach project by his school's nurse.

William, who is a sixth-grader at Fairview Elementary School in Visalia, was diagnosed with asthma two years ago.

"I have learned a lot," said Santillan, who was surprised to learn that the candles throughout her house could be a trigger to her son's asthma condition. "It [program] gave me a lot of information."

Tulare County doctors say the project is useful.

"There really is a need for [asthma] education out there," said John Tyndal, director of community outreach for Kaweah Delta Health Care District. "Asthma it is a chronic illness something you have to be educated through out your life."

San Joaquin Valley air has been deemed among the worst in the country, which exacerbates asthma symptoms for sufferers.

In 2008, Kaweah Delta treated close to 1,400 patients for asthma in its emergency room, 435 of whom were children 12 or younger.

More than half of those were 5 or younger, the fastest growing age group of children diagnosed with asthma.

"The program provides the education, it's up to the families to make the necessary changes," Tyndal said.

Kaweah Delta worked with the office of U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer to get funding for project, said Robyn Flores, grant development manager for Kaweah Delta Health Care District.

Additional Facts

To learn more about the Kaweah Delta Health District's Asthma Outreach Project, call 624-2520.

City of Tulare's liquid natural gas fuel station may open to public

By Luis Hernandez

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Jan. 25, 2010

Privately owned trucks and cars could soon join Tulare city buses and garbage trucks in fueling up at the city's liquefied-natural-gas station.

Clean Energy, the company that provides fuel to the station, is proposing investing \$500,000 in the city-owned fueling station, taking over station management and opening it to the public, said Tulare Public Works Director Lew Nelson.

The city uses LNG to power buses and garbage trucks, and Compressed Natural Gas for other city vehicles.

Under the proposal, Clean Energy would:

- Add fuel dispensers and replace them if necessary.
- Upgrade Compressed Natural Gas pressure and storage capacity.
- Increase LNG storage capacity.

The proposal also calls for Clean Energy to:

- Set retail prices for fuel sales.
- Pay the city a royalty per gallon sold to privately owned vehicle.
- Maintain the station.

Clean Energy could seek state funding to pay for the improvements.

Nelson said having an outside vendor responsible for maintenance would relieve fleet maintenance workers from such duty.

"While we have so far avoided being unable to fuel due to maintenance problems, there have been some close calls in the past," he said.

Tulare would continue buying LNG from Clean Energy, which already operates stations in Southern California.

The city will continue owning the station.

Help replacing some trucks possible

Once the improvements are made, Clean Energy would work with local milk-carrying fleets to access grant money to replace diesel trucks with LNG-powered trucks.

A 15-liter engine that runs on LNG and is capable of hauling freight over the Grapevine has been introduced, Nelson said.

That would make using the fuel more attractive.

"There are many benefits to the local fleets from use of LNG fuel instead of diesel, including operating cost per mile and reduced air emissions," Nelson said.

Tulare City Manager Darrel Pyle said improvements at the gas-fueling station could lead to a new tax revenue for local coffers. "That could be an interesting revenue source," he said.

Additional Facts

Liquefied Natural Gas basics

LNG is natural gas in its liquid form. Natural gas is converted to LNG by cooling it to -260F, at which point it becomes a liquid. This process reduces its volume by a factor of more than 600 — similar to reducing the volume of a beach ball to the volume of a Ping-Pong ball.

LNG is an odorless, nontoxic and noncorrosive liquid, and if spilled, LNG would not result in a slick.

Absent an ignition source, LNG evaporates quickly and disperses, leaving no residue. There is no environmental cleanup needed for LNG spills on water or land.

Source: Center for liquefied natural gas

Villagers protest Chinese incinerator

By William Foreman, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, Jan. 24, 2010

GUANGZHOU, China—About 100 villagers on Monday protested the construction of a garbage incinerator in southern China, alleging several residents have already become sick from pollution from another trash-burning facility in the area.

Waste disposal is becoming a contentious issue as crowded China tries to find new places to dump garbage. Citizens have become more environmentally conscious, more worried about their health and property—and more willing to protest.

Monday's protesters came from the village of Likeng, where people have long complained that an incinerator in the area was causing cancer and other illnesses. They were angry that the government had begun building another incinerator in the village, in the northern part of the booming city of Guangzhou.

Carrying small white protest signs, the 100 or so demonstrators tried to march close to the Guangdong provincial government's headquarters. But scores of police boxed them in and then corralled them off with crime scene tape on the sidewalk across from the government building.

"The government refuses to listen to the people. We don't want another incinerator because we know the one we have now is killing people," said a protester who would only give her surname, Chen. "At night, we don't dare open our windows because the air is so bad."

The government has repeatedly said the incinerator was safe. An official who observed Monday's protest told the AP the villagers' complaints were being considered.

"The city will handle this matter in a proper way. We just hope everyone will be calm and reasonable," said the official, who would only give his surname, Hu, and declined to say which department he worked for.

On Sunday, about 400 people protested the construction of another incinerator in the Gaoming district of Foshan, a city next to Guangzhou, the state-run Southern Daily newspaper reported Monday.

Demonstrators have also been active in Guangzhou's southern Panyu district, where officials recently decided to delay an incinerator project so that they could do more environmental tests and public consultation.

NM governor takes aim at coal-fired power plants

By Susan Montoya Bryan, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2010

SANTA FE, N.M.—Gov. Bill Richardson has painted a target on New Mexico's coal-fired power plants, saying they provide a major source of electricity for homes and businesses in the state but pump far too much pollution into the air.

Richardson called out the coal plants during his State of the State speech before the Legislature on Tuesday, but his administration says they're not the only polluters the governor is after.

"It could be any kind of entity that has an air permit. We're talking about really gross violators of our air pollution laws," said Sarah Cottrell, the governor's energy policy adviser.

Part of Richardson's solution includes legislation to give state regulators the power to deny new permits or revoke existing permits after a track record of air quality violations. State laws that govern water, solid wastes and hazardous materials already include a so-called "bad actor" clause, but the air quality act does not.

Richardson also plans to tackle emissions blamed for global warming with legislation that would lay the groundwork for a future cap-and-trade program, either as part of the Western Climate Initiative's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or as a mandate from the federal government.

The measure would allow state regulators to establish rules for early reduction credits, offsets and the reporting of greenhouse gas emissions for electricity imported to New Mexico.

Jim Norton, director of the New Mexico Environment Department's Environmental Protection Division, said Richardson's proposals would be an important step toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

But would the measures have an immediate impact on New Mexico's biggest source of emissions—the coal plants?

Norton said that depends on what kind of permitting actions may come up in the future.

The San Juan Generating Station near Farmington recently completed \$330 million in improvements to reduce emissions, settling thousands of air quality violations that occurred over the course of a few years. New Mexico's largest utility, Public Service Company of New Mexico, owns a large stake in the plant.

The neighboring Four Corners Power Plant, one of the largest coal-fired plants in the United States, also meets or exceeds all state and federal environmental regulations, said Damon Gross, a spokesman for Arizona Public Service Co., which owns part of that plant.

Despite their efforts to stay in compliance, Norton said coal-fired plants are still a leading source of the pollutants that make up greenhouse gases.

Tom Singer, a senior policy analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council, applauded Richardson for highlighting New Mexico's heavy reliance on coal.

"Unless New Mexico electricity consumers shuck all that coal power, we're not really going to change the game," he said. "We need to dip our toe into efficiency and renewables."

The problem is that coal-fired plants produce most of the electricity that powers New Mexico, and there are currently no alternatives with limited emissions that could produce enough electricity to meet demand.

"For better or for worse, coal is a key part of our energy mix and it is a major reason why our rates are so low compared to other states," PNM spokesman Don Brown said. "We absolutely acknowledge that there are environmental impacts from coal and are seeking to reduce the impacts as much as possible."

Brown said PNM is expanding its portfolio to include more renewable energy projects. He pointed to a new partnership with First Solar of Arizona to build five photovoltaic facilities that could produce enough electricity for 7,000 homes.

Arizona Public Service is doing the same by investing in wind, geothermal and solar projects, including a 280-megawatt concentrated solar project south of Phoenix.

There's no certainty Richardson's air quality bills will get through the Legislature this year, as lawmakers are busy scrambling to close a whopping budget shortfall.

The "bad actor" bill didn't get far when it was introduced last year, and anything concerning greenhouse gases is expected to result in a long floor debate.

Rell urges action on smog standard

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2010

HARTFORD, Conn.—Governor M. Jodi Rell is urging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to quickly adopt the new and more stringent smog standard it has proposed.

Rell says the move would improve air quality in the Northeast and sanction upwind states to the south and west where smog-causing pollutants are generated.

The governor says the stronger standard will help the nation more aggressively address unacceptably high levels of illness and death caused by exposure to excessive levels of ozone.

The EPA has said it will review comments on its proposed standard and issue the final standard by Aug. 31.

Ark. panel vote upholds permit for Turk plant

By Chuck Bartels, Associated Press Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2010

NORTH LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — A state regulatory panel Friday upheld an air quality permit for the utility that's building a \$1.6 billion coal-fired electric plant in Hempstead County.

The 7-1 vote by the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission accepted a hearing officer's recommendation that an appeal by opponents of the 600-megawatt plant near Texarkana be turned away.

The Sierra Club and landowners near the plant sought to block the permit, arguing that the Southwest Electric Power Co. facility would generate too much mercury, sulfur dioxide and carbon dioxide.

Friday's ruling clears only part of the way for the utility. Still pending is SWEPCO's challenge to an Arkansas Court of Appeals ruling that invalidated a permit issued by the Arkansas Public Service Commission.

Shreveport, La.-based SWEPCO and its parent company, American Electric Power of Columbus, Ohio, have appealed that finding to the Arkansas Supreme Court.

The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality approved the air quality permit in November 2008, but it was held up by the appeal. The panel's finding could still be challenged in court.

Attorney Frederick Addison, representing the Hempstead County Hunting Club, argued that emissions from the John W. Turk Plant would be too great, while utility attorney Kelly McQueen argued that the plant would be the "most stringently controlled pulverized coal plant in the country."

Addison said the permit should be invalidated because commission members weren't subject to financial disclosure, which would have revealed that former panel member Thomas Schueck's company did business with the Shaw Group, the company building the plant.

But McQueen said the commission followed the law, which she said was affirmed by hearing officer Michael O'Malley. She said mentioning Schueck's business ties was an attempt to distract commissioners from legitimate issues.

"It (the issuing of the permit) was the product of a process that worked," McQueen said.

Addison also argued that SWEPCO should not have relied on wind pattern data gathered at the airport in Shreveport, saying the distance and difference in terrain render the results invalid. But McQueen said the areas are similar enough to be scientifically sound.

Sierra Club attorney Richard Mays said the plant would generate 264 million tons of carbon dioxide over 50 years.

SWEPCO intends to sell much of the power from the plant to other utilities.

"Arkansas is going to get only 15 percent of the electricity generated by this plant," Mays said, "but it's going to get all of the pollution."

EPA suspects Chevron knew of pollution violation

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Jan. 22, 2010

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency seized computers, files, photos and other records as part of its investigation into whether Chevron knowingly violated air pollution permits at two remote facilities on the west side of Cook Inlet.

The searches authorized by U.S. Magistrate Deborah Smith occurred Jan. 12-13 at Chevron's Trading Bay Production Facility and Granite Point Tank Farm, the Anchorage Daily News reported Friday.

In seeking a warrant, EPA Special Agent Matthew Goers told the judge his agency had enough information to suspect Chevron—and possibly its subsidiaries, managers and employees—committed Clean Air Act violations and made false statements to the federal government.

At Trading Bay and Granite Point, a Chevron subsidiary processes and stores crude oil from Cook Inlet production platforms. The company then ships the oil to a refinery in Nikiski.

The alleged violations began in 2006, when Chevron shut down a vapor control unit for two of its oil storage tanks at Trading Bay. The vapor control units were designed to capture vapor from the oil before it leaves the tanks. Shutting the units down allowed air pollution to escape, Goers wrote.

Chevron had described the tanks to regulators in 2006 and 2007 as "insignificant sources" of pollution that emitted no more than 2 tons per year of volatile organic compounds and 2 tons per year of hazardous air pollutants.

Instead, the Trading Bay tanks released more than 100 tons per year of volatile organics into the air from 2006 to 2008, Goers wrote. The Granite Point tanks released more than 15 tons per year of crude oil vapors in the same time period.

Chevron, in a written statement, said it's cooperating with the investigation.

"In May of 2008, we provided the government with voluntary disclosure relating to these issues and have been cooperating with the government's information requests since that time," the statement said. "We take such noncompliance allegations seriously."

The purpose for the search warrants was to gather evidence that the company knowingly withheld information and gave "material false statements" to environmental regulators, Goers wrote.

From 2006 to 2008, Chevron submitted documents to environmental regulators saying its Cook Inlet facilities complied with their air permits. In 2007, company officials told regulators that they were still using the vapor control system at Trading Bay, and that the tanks were not venting to the atmosphere, Goers wrote.

In 2008, Chevron sent a letter to state regulators saying it had potentially been violating its Clean Air Act permit at Trading Bay since shutting down its vapor control unit two years earlier. It requested that regulators invoke a federal policy that waives or reduces fines for companies that self-report their own violations.

In 2009, a state inspector visited Granite Point and asked a Chevron operator how its vapors were recovered. The operator said the vapor control unit "was not operating at the time because a necessary compressor was not operating." Regulators later learned the unit had shut down in 2007, Goers wrote.

On the day of the state inspection, Chevron sent a letter to state regulators, asking to amend its previous filings about air pollution at Granite Point.

Sunflower DNA Map Could Produce Plants for Fuel

By Dirk Lammers, Associated Press

In the Capital Press and other papers, Friday, January 22, 2010

A \$10.5 million research project aimed at mapping the DNA sequence of sunflowers could one day yield a towering new variety for both food and fuel.

Researchers envision crossbreeding a standard sunflower with the Silverleaf species out of Texas to produce a hybrid with bright yellow flowers bursting with tasty seeds and thick stalks filled with complex sugars that can be turned into ethanol.

The wild, drought-resistant Silverleaf is known for its woody stalks, which can grow up 15 feet tall and 4 inches in diameter.

"Since it's the closest relative of the cultivated sunflower, it should be perhaps reasonably straightforward to move some of the traits," said Loren Rieseberg, a University of British Columbia botany professor and leader of the DNA sequencing project.

The Genomics of Sunflower project is funded by Genome Canada through the Canadian government, Genome BC, the U.S. Energy and Agriculture departments and France's National Institute for Agricultural Research.

Its goal is to locate genes responsible for agriculturally important traits such as seed oil content, flowering, drought and pest tolerance. Participants plan to map the genome for the greater sunflower family, known in the science world as Compositae and including more than 24,000 species of sunflowers, lettuce, artichokes, daisies, ragweed, dandelions and other plants.

Scientists hope that within four years, they'll be able to develop a basis for a breeding program in which understanding of the plants' genes dramatically reduces the time it takes to develop hybrids.

Rieseberg's work with co-investigator Steve Knapp from the University of Georgia has already been helpful to the industry, said Larry Kleingartner, executive director of the Mandan, N.D.-based National Sunflower Association.

Their research helped identify a trait that imparts resistance to downy mildew, which destroys plant tissue, and its association with a gene that imparts resistance to rust, a fungus that affects yield and quality, Kleingartner said.

"That kind of information is so important so we don't have to go through eight years of grow outs to see if we've got this resistance in this hybrid," he said. "We can just do it on a very molecular basis."

The sunflower mapping venture is the latest of several plant genome projects.

In 2008, a group of researchers led by Washington University in St. Louis mapped the corn genome and posted its research on the Internet. The \$29.5 million project, funded by the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Energy and Agriculture departments, will allow seed companies to tweak the genome to increase the plant's productivity.

Scientists also have mapped the genes of the black cottonwood tree, rice, the potato, the pinot noir grape and a weed called *Arabidopsis thaliana*.

Sunflowers are a nearly \$14 billion a year industry, with some 32 million metric tons produced worldwide each year, according to the National Sunflower Association. In the United States, they're grown primarily in North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Minnesota and Colorado. They're used primarily for cooking oil, although the seeds also are found in snacks and other products.

The family's genome is 3.5 billion letters long, which is slightly larger than the human genome.

Researchers say mapping the family's entire sequence could lead to crop improvement, weed control and the development of wood-producing varieties that could be used for flooring and other products. Increasing the complex sugars in Silverleaf's stalk would make it a viable feedstock for ethanol, Rieseberg said.

"It's extremely drought tolerant and grows very, very tall," he said. "And what's remarkable is that it's pretty much wood from bottom to top, and yet it's an annual."

The nation's 170 operating ethanol plants can produce 10.6 billion gallons of the fuel per year, according to the Renewable Fuels Association, but the vast majority of that fuel comes from corn. Growing criticism from a diverse alliance of cattle ranchers, grocers and environmentalists about using corn for fuel has prompted the industry to look at nonfood feedstocks such as switchgrass, corn stover and wood waste.

Congress had hoped ethanol production from nonfood sources would reach 100 million gallons in 2010, but companies are expected to fall far short of that goal.