

Workshop Today On Electric Cars

Modesto Bee Staff

Modesto Bee, Saturday, July 21, 2012

An electric vehicle workshop will be offered from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. today at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Northern Region Headquarters, 4800 Enterprise Way, in Modesto.

The free event is titled "The Future is Electric: Plug In and Get There!" Sponsors include the Modesto Irrigation District, the Drive Clean Rebate Program, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the San Joaquin Valley Clean Cities Coalition.

The program includes:

- 10 a.m.: Introduction by Colin Santulli, California Center for Sustainable Energy, and opening remarks by Ceres Mayor Chris Vierra
- 10:10: Santulli on the basics of plug-in electric vehicles, or PEVs, including environmental, public health and economic benefits
- 10:20: David Lopez, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, on local PEV incentives and an overview of the Drive Clean Rebate Program
- 10:40: Amy Willis, California Center for Sustainable Energy, on state and federal PEV incentives, with an emphasis on the state rebate application process, project funding and frequently asked questions
- 11 a.m.: Bob Hondeville, Modesto Irrigation District, on PEV impact to grid and utility bills: grid reliability, rate programs and how MID can help customers prepare their homes for PEV fueling
- 11:15 a.m.: Panel of local PEV drivers: Hear about the PEV experience from your neighbors, including motivations to purchase a PEV, home charger installation process and utility rate experience
- 11:45: Free lunch, during which PEV drivers will be available to answer questions and vehicles will be on display and available for test drives

EPA reviews part of power plant rule

Associated Press

In the Hanford Sentinel, Friday, July 20, 2012

The Environmental Protection Agency is reviewing part of a controversial rule that sets the first federal standards to reduce toxic air pollution from power plants.

The rule, issued in December, is aimed at curbing mercury and other toxic pollutants from coal- and oil-fired power plants. The Obama administration calls the rule a sensible step to reduce pollution, but Republicans have denounced it as a part of a "war on coal." The rule could force hundreds of the nation's oldest and dirtiest power plants to clean up or shut down.

The review, announced Friday, focuses on an aspect of the rule that applies to future power plants. The technical review is intended to clarify how the new standards would apply to five plants proposed in Texas, Georgia, Kansas and Utah.

EPA officials called the review a routine step that will have no impact on standards already set for existing power plants. Those rules will protect millions of families from air pollution, the agency said.

The review was prompted by criticism from power plant operators who said the rule as drafted was confusing for new plants.

A spokesman for the American Lung Association, which pushed for the power plant rule, called the review "narrowly crafted." While the group is not happy with the change, "it is not a significant deal," said spokesman Paul Billings.

An official for one of the power companies that sought the review said the EPA's decision to reconsider standards for new plants was an acknowledgment by the agency that its standards are unachievable.

Ken Anderson, executive vice president of Colorado-based Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, said the EPA should review the overall rule "and come back with a regulatory standard that has a proper timeframe and is rooted in the realities of science and engineering." Tri-State has proposed a coal-fired power plant in Kansas.

The EPA rule is intended to slash mercury and other toxic emissions from the oldest and most polluting oil- and coal-fired power plants. The EPA has had authority to set such rules since 1990, but did not impose them until late last year, after a court threw out an attempt by the Bush administration to exempt power plants from such controls.

Power plants are the largest remaining source of manmade mercury in the environment. Mercury is a toxic metal that's known to impair brain development in children, including those exposed in the womb.

When fully implemented in 2016, the standards will slash mercury pollution from burning coal by 90 percent, lung-damaging acid gases by 88 percent and soot-producing sulfur dioxide by 41 percent. Environmental groups and public health advocates say the rule will prevent thousands of premature deaths and avoid millions of dollars in health care costs for asthma and other illnesses.

Republicans and some industry groups say the benefits of the regulation do not outweigh rising electricity bills, jobs lost from shuttered power plants and the nearly \$10 billion per year cost. They have portrayed the regulation as an effort by the EPA to kill coal, which is responsible for more than 40 percent of U.S. electricity production.

Changing economics, such as low natural gas prices and reduced electricity demand, are major factors in older coal-fired power plants shutting down.

The review of standards for new plants is due to be completed next March.

County: Hydrogen Energy plant may require review as chemical plant

By John Cox, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, July 21, 2012

County officials are raising concerns that could create new hurdles for the \$4 billion Hydrogen Energy California plant proposed near Tupman.

Kern County Planning Director Lorelei Oviatt recently told HECA's lead permitting agency, the state Energy Commission, that the hybrid power plant proposal "has the characteristics of a chemical manufacturing plant," which she stated is prohibited by the site's agricultural zoning.

While local and state officials await clarification from the project's developer, commission staff said Thursday they aren't yet convinced of Oviatt's conclusions. Even so, they said any finding that the project does amount to a chemical plant would complicate HECA's regulatory review but not doom the proposal.

A more profound issue may come into play, however. Chemical production is considered key to HECA's revised economics, and limiting its manufacturing plans -- were that to happen -- could affect the entire project's viability.

At issue in recent communications among the three parties is what chemicals the 453-acre plant would produce and what industries would use them. Chemicals used in agriculture, such as fertilizers, are allowed under the site's existing zoning.

HECA's promotional materials refer only to plans to make fertilizer, electricity for sale to the state power grid, and carbon dioxide for use in nearby oil production.

But Oviatt stated in a July 12 letter to the commission that chemicals listed in HECA's application package -- specifically, urea, urea ammonium nitrate and anhydrous ammonia -- suggest the plant would produce products "beyond the scope of the production of fertilizer for agricultural uses." She wrote that the application makes it appear the project will make products for transportation and industrial applications.

If this is the case, she added, the county will require that the developer apply for an amendment to the county's General Plan and a zone change, which tends to require rigorous scrutiny.

Oviatt could not be reached for comment last week.

No definite plans

HECA spokeswoman Tiffany Rau noted that the plant would make products commonly used in Kern farming. But, quoting from the project's permit application, she added: "These products do have other uses, and HECA will work with the County if it will sell its products for non-agricultural uses."

Specifically, the plant would be capable of producing a urea solution that mitigates nitrogen oxide emissions from diesel engines, which Rau suggested would help California's transportation sector.

She wrote in an email that HECA will work with the county to clarify and resolve any issues or concerns, "including any future intentions to sell products for non-agriculture uses."

Energy Commission staff, speaking in regard to the permitting process, downplayed the county's concerns relating to the plant's chemical manufacturing aspects.

Commission project manager Bob Worl said the county's comparison of the project to a chemical plant "may be in part a mischaracterization" because the manufacturing component is only part of the larger proposal.

While he and another staff member welcomed the county's expertise in reviewing chemical plants, and said they will work closely with the county throughout the review, they said Oviatt's letter mainly serves to alert the agency to something it would have addressed anyway.

The letter "raises questions that need to be asked and analyzed in the process of going through this," Worl said.

"It's certainly additional work and additional topics to which staff must attend in their discovery and analysis. But our process is pretty straightforward, pretty thorough."

Worl added that HECA has not yet provided a full list of products that would be manufactured at the plant. He said the commission expects to receive such a list during the review process.

Financial imperative

The idea that the plant would manufacture chemicals distinguishes it from the previous owners' plans.

Before selling the project last year to Massachusetts-based SCS Energy LLC, co-owners BP, the international oil giant, and mining company Rio Tinto sought only to have the plant generate electricity for the grid and sell byproduct carbon dioxide for nearby oil production.

SCS Energy has said making fertilizer is crucial to turning a profit at the plant, which the company says would employ 2,000 workers during construction and create 140 permanent jobs.

Nearby residents and environmental groups have recently ramped up opposition to the proposal, saying its emissions would pollute air in the area.

Despite SCS Energy's plans to bury up to 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide a year in the nearby Elk Hills oil field, opponents argue that the plant should not be allowed to run on coal and petroleum coke as proposed.

"Too many people in the valley are already dying from the dangerously [poor air quality](#)," Andrea Issod, staff attorney for the Sierra Club, stated in a news release opposing the HECA proposal.

If it wins commission approval, SCS Energy hopes to begin operation of the plant in 2017. After that, it has said, it plans to sell the plant to another operator.

Shafter air monitor finds pesticide concentrations below harmful levels

By John Cox, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, July 21, 2012

Pesticide concentrations at a Shafter air monitoring station were found to be well below harmful levels in the nation's first long-term testing for such chemicals.

A report released Friday by the state Department of Pesticide Regulation said that in three agricultural areas including Shafter, only one of 34 chemicals and five associated breakdown products exceeded

levels considered safe. The exception -- acrolein -- is believed to result from automobile or industrial emissions.

Kern County Farm Bureau President Steve Maniaci hailed the results as proof that the local agricultural community puts the community's health and safety first when trying to prevent and eradicate pests.

"When the application of pesticides is necessary for the safety and quality of the food produced, we go to a great extent making sure there is no impact to our neighbors in the surrounding communities," he said in a news release. "This also shows the educational efforts of our 'Spray Safe' program is working here in Kern County."

The study covered the period from Feb. 1 to Dec. 31 of last year. The Shafter monitoring station is located near a city well by Shafter High School. The other test sites were outside Kern County, in Salinas and Ripon.

The department said it decided which chemicals to test for based on how often they are used and the health risks they present. The list includes six fumigants and 11 organophosphates, which attack the nervous system and are more dangerous as exposure increases.

In the Shafter testing, eight pesticides and breakdown products -- acrolein, chlorpyrifos, chlorpyrifos OA, diazinon, diazinon OA, EPTC, methyl bromide and MITC -- were detected at concentrations greater than trace levels. Twelve other pesticides and breakdown products were found to be present at trace levels. The remaining chemicals were not detected.

Excluding acrolein, the chemicals diazinon and diazinon OA had by far the highest one-day concentrations relative to the level considered dangerous. Diazinon's one-day peak was found to be about 54 percent below the safety threshold; for diazinon OA, the one-day peak was about 72 percent below the threshold.

The department, part of the California Environmental Protection Agency, said it set the thresholds based not on enforceable limits but as guideposts for preliminary evaluation of data.

The air monitoring network was established in 2011 to broaden the state's knowledge of potential health risks from long-term pesticide exposure.