

LOCAL NEWS

Home > Today's Paper > Local News

 Local News RSS Feed  Print Story  E-mail Story

Letters from public largely support refinery alternative

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
 sshepard@bakersfield.com | Tuesday, Aug 12 2008 6:29 PM

Last Updated: Wednesday, Aug 13 2008 8:40 AM

A recent proposal to expand the Big West of California refinery on Rosedale Highway without using new toxic chemicals has been gaining public support.

OUR READERS RECOMMEND:

BCHS football player dies
 In car wrecks, sometimes, under the law, its better for the defendant to run
 Williams-Sonoma opens next weekend
 Animal hoarding: Why do they do it?
 Lois Henry: Scrivner's threat speaks volumes

WANT A SAY?

You can obtain a copy of the Big West environmental impact report by contacting Kern County Supervising Planner Cheryl Casdorff at 862-8624.

Copies are also available for review at the Kern County Planning Department, the Beale Memorial Library and the Southwest branch.

Written comments should be mailed to the Kern County Planning Department at the address above.

Planning staff will also hold informational workshops on the report prior to a public hearing and vote by the Kern County Planning Commission. The public hearing is scheduled for 7 p.m. Sept. 25.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Big West's "Clean Fuels Project" would allow the facility to nearly double gasoline production and increase diesel output by 60 percent without increasing crude oil coming into the facility.

Big West's parent company, Flying J, said when it bought the refinery from Shell Oil in 2005 that an expansion would be needed to ensure the facility's long-term viability.

The project is expected to cost about \$700 million.

Big West initially proposed to boost production by building new processing units that would use a potent acid catalyst that could have devastating impacts to people in nearby homes and businesses in the event of a major accident. Public concern eventually prompted the county to halt the permitting process last year in order to better study the chemical's impacts and possible alternatives to it.

A revised environmental impact report released in June contained a new option for the refinery to expand.

The new proposal, called Alternative D, would boost production by building a new processing unit similar to one currently operating at the refinery.

Alternative D would not only eliminate hazards from additional toxic chemicals but it's also been called "environmentally superior" because it would create less air pollution and odor and fewer greenhouse gases than the the company's original plan, the report said.

In comment letters submitted to the county in response to a revised environmental impact report on the project, individuals and groups have favored Alternative D, the new approach that's been called "environmentally superior" to the company's original plans to use the toxic chemical modified hydrofluoric, said Kern County Planning Department Division Chief Lorelei Oviatt.

"Overall, people think Alternative D is a good idea," Oviatt said.

The county also received some 1,500 form letters expressing blanket support for the expansion in any form from residents around Kern County, including some as far away as Boron and Ridgecrest.

But some concerns still persist.

Adams, Broadwell, Joseph and Cardozo, a San Francisco law firm representing local building trade unions and an environmental group, filed more than 100 pages of comments that raised questions about additional air pollution and the threat of contaminated soil becoming airborne during construction.

The firm's letter also sharply criticized development plans that could put thousands more people close to the refinery. It referred to the Westside Parkway, a major new east-west roadway that would run along the refinery's south side, and West Village, a massive commercial/residential development planned for the corner of Brimhall and Coffee roads.

"Neither of these projects must be allowed to go ahead," attorney Gloria Smith's comment letter said. "The county has already allowed profoundly incompatible land uses through residential and commercial development all around the refinery ... These poor planning decisions may now put tens of thousands of residents at risk should there be a refinery accident. The county must not further compound these irreconcilable land uses by permitting additional non-industrial development in the refinery's shadow."

County planners will respond to the

The option does have drawbacks for Big West. The original plans would be more profitable and equipment to implement them has already been purchased.

The project requires approval from the Kern County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, which can approve either the original proposal or Alternative D.

The project also requires an air permit from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and a separate environmental permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The expansion would create about 100 new jobs at the refinery paying an average of about \$70,000 a year, double the facility's property taxes from about \$1.5 million to \$3 million annually, and create 1,200 construction jobs, refinery officials say.

In addition to concerns about toxic chemicals, opponents have raised concerns about air pollution, greenhouse gases and truck traffic on Rosedale Highway.

comments in an official document in coming weeks. They also plan to hold public workshops on the expansion project leading up to votes by the county Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

While the official comment period has ended, county planning officials said they will continue to accept and respond to any additional feedback received on the project until the matter goes before the Board of Supervisors for approval.

Big West officials received copies of the comments Tuesday afternoon but said they couldn't respond yet as they hadn't reviewed them.

Company officials have said they prefer their original expansion plan but would be comfortable with Alternative D, despite some of its economic drawbacks.

PHOTOS:



Photo by Casey Christie

Big West of California refinery on Rosedale Highway.

RELATED STORIES:

- Lois Henry: Refinery should have laid out all options for expansion
- Big West: Alternative refining process 'would work'
- Refinery environmental report released
- Refinery to Florez: We take safety seriously
- Lois Henry: Big West refinery must do better to earn our trust
- The Big West debate: Who's right?
- Refinery debate turns into advertising war

LINKS:

- Want to know more? Check out The Californian's refinery page

MOST READ

1. Stabbing closes out Lowrider event
2. Woman arrested on suspicion of attempted extortion
3. DUI suspect arrested after hitting car twice, leading police on chase
4. Two arrested in connection with robbery
5. Funeral services for Aug. 3

MOST EMAILED

1. High bee prices sting almond growers
2. Taking inventory for some California pet-trust p
3. Pot gardens an 'ecological disaster'
4. Diabetes and me: A reporter's journey from fear to self-control
5. 16-screen cinemaplex breaks ground

Site map

News

- Today's Paper
- Local News
- Latest News
- Sports
- Race to Victory
- Staff Blogs
 - Bakosphere
 - Ask the Californian
 - Breaking News
 - City Beat
 - School House Zach
- Business
- Eye Street
- State News
- World News
- Weather
- Obituaries
- Funeral Notices

Other

- Multimedia
- Photo Galleries
- Interactive Maps
- Special Reports
- RSS Feeds

Advertisement Services

- Deal of the Day
- Media Contact Newsroom
- Rate Cards
- Classified Advertising
- Movies

Subscriber Services

- Editorial
- Calendar
- Press Pass
- Feedback Asked Questions
- Contact Us
- Web Release

Other Resources

- Blog: Cocktail Culture
- About Us
- Community
 - Contact Us
 - Your Words
 - Privacy Policy
 - Submit Your Article
 - Terms of Use
 - Blogs
 - Create Your Blog
 - Staff Blogs
 - All Blogs
- Applause
- Snap!

Inside Guide

- Dining
- Home & Garden
- Bakersfield.org
- Personal Care
- Business
 - Bakersfield Business
 - Start Your Business
 - Jobs
- Opinion

- Editorials
- Opinion Headlines
- Columns
- Columnists
- Letters to the Editor
- Blog: Bakersfield
- Southwest Voice

- Marketplace
 - Real Estate News
 - Classifieds
 - Items under \$100
 - Merchandise
 - Pets & Animals
 - Public Notices
- Autos
- Homes
 - Featured Agents
 - Real Estate Rentals
- Jobs
 - Jobs at The Californian
- Shopping
- Special Sections
- Place Your Ad
 - Print and Online
 - Online Only