

Press Release

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For Immediate Release
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Saying YES to the Environmental Review Process

The Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority (SVSWA) is responsible for the safe landfill disposal of garbage received from all cities within the Salinas Valley and the eastern portion of Monterey County. In its efforts to end the practice of burying waste in the ground, and to utilize trash as a resource, over the past 6 years the SVSWA has been researching alternative methods for processing waste (garbage). This research has recently led to further study of a specific waste conversion technology being proposed by Plasco Energy Group of Ottawa, Canada. This technology uses a non-incineration heating process called plasma arc gasification that changes garbage into a type of fuel gas called syngas. The syngas is then used to run engines to produce electricity. Materials that can be recycled are removed before the process begins. The proposed alternative to landfill disposal which has been studied by the Board of Directors since 2005 and the review of conversion technologies which has been the topic of discussion at 40 public meetings beginning in 2006. The project is currently anticipated to provide an estimated 65 construction and trade jobs during the 18 month plant construction and 37 permanent full time labor and technical jobs if approved and implemented.

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this proposed project must be studied to determine if there is potential for significant impacts to the community and environment. Two meetings, called Scoping Meetings, were scheduled to hear public comments on the preparation of the State required Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project. Two documents, a Notice of Preparation and an Initial Study, are currently available for public review. These documents describe the proposed Plasco project and also describe what information is included in the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report. These documents can be found on the SVSWA website at www.svswa.org. The City of Gonzales also sponsored a community meeting in advance of these scoping meetings to provide information for the community about what is involved in environmental review of a project and how to actively participate in the public process.

The first round of meeting notices about the Scoping meetings was included in utility bills for customers in Gonzales. The utility bill notice inadvertently omitted the date of the first scoping meeting in the Spanish-translated version. The SVSWA apologized for this clerical oversight and a second round of notices, in both English and Spanish, was provided by direct mail to every Gonzales zip code address in advance of the first meeting to again notify residents about the two meetings. Meeting dates were selected based on availability of the Gonzales High School gym and to allow adequate time for comments to be received during the 30 day Initial Study review period ending March 7. A professional interpreter was present at the meeting to provide translation services. Presentations on two screens were provided in Spanish and English.

At the first community meeting on February 22, there were approximately 65 people signed-in the audience and 50 headsets were available and distributed to provide Spanish translation for non-English speaking members of the community. It was observed that some bilingual members of organizations present at the meeting also requested headsets for translation, which resulted in a shortage of translation equipment for non-English speaking community members.

These particular public meetings are not legal proceedings. They are being held to provide information for the public and to provide additional opportunity for public comments.

Due to interest in this project, the SVSWA will be extending the comment period from 30 days to 45 days to allow more time for community input. Comments on issues that community members want to see addressed in the environmental review document will be accepted through March 22.

The SVSWA appreciates public participation in the information process, including community attendance at meetings and receiving public comments and concerns about the proposed project. The SVSWA encourages those attending future meetings to demonstrate respectful conduct toward others at the meetings, and to provide their comments on issues they want to see addressed in the environmental review document.

Whether members of the community and public are for, against, undecided, or uninformed about the Plasco Salinas Valley Project, everyone will benefit from the completion of the Environmental Impact Report regarding this proposed project and the State mandated review process. The SVSWA has received letters supporting the environmental review process from organizations and individuals such as the Salinas Valley Builders Exchange, Senator Anthony Cannella, Monterey County Farm Bureau, Monterey Bay Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, Former Pro Tem of the CA Senate David A. Roberti, and the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce.

It appears that GreenAction of San Francisco and their local organizers have already determined that the proposed Plasco Project will be detrimental to the residents of Gonzales without benefit of the thorough and detailed environmental review required by the laws of the state of California. The Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority is committed to completion of the Environmental Impact Report so the public, the agency and our elected officials can make informed decisions on the proposed Plasco project based on factual information. The SVSWA encourages all residents who are interested in knowing more about the proposed Plasco project to contact the SVSWA offices, participate in the next scoping meeting on February 28th, or to send comments in writing to the SVSWA no later than March 22 regarding information to include in the environmental review document (EIR).