

**DESALINATION:**

**Desal plans go before coastal panel; Staff urges denial of Cal Am plant permits**

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**By Kevin Howe, staff writer**

California American Water's permits for an experimental desalination plant at Moss Landing face tough sledding before the California Coastal Commission this month.

The commission has scheduled a hearing Thursday in San Francisco on an appeal of a permit for the plant issued by Monterey County brought by Coastal Commissioners Patrick Kruer and Mary Shallenberger.

The commission found a "substantial issue" had been raised concerning conformity to the county's Local Coastal Program at an Oct. 12 hearing and the commission staff is recommending that the original permit and a new permit sought by Cal Am be denied.

The water company wants to install and operate a plant for a year that would draw seawater from the Moss Landing Power Plant cooling system, separate, treat and recombine the water before discharging it back into the power plant's outfall to Monterey Bay.

The pilot plant would divert up to 288,000 gallons of seawater per day from the power plant's once-through cooling water intake system, which draws 180 million to 1 billion gallons a day.

The seawater would go through two parallel pretreatment processes and reverse osmosis systems, and discharge the treated water back into Monterey Bay through the power plant's outfall.

On the way through the plant, the water would be treated with or come in contact with various treatment chemicals, including chlorine, acids, coagulants, polymers and cleaning agents applied at various times to the plant machinery. Discharge of such chemicals would amount to less than 100 gallons a day, along with about 100 pounds of residual solids per day. The heaviest concentrations would go into a sewer system, not the outfall.

Opponents contend that the project does not conform to Local Coastal Program provisions related to water quality, protecting marine biological resources, public and environmental health because of the wastewater discharges.

Also, the opponents said the proposed location does not conform to a county ordinance stating that desalination facilities should be publicly owned.

The pilot desalination plant is a precursor to development of a \$200 million regional seawater desalination plant and distribution system by Cal Am at Moss Landing that would produce 11,730 acre-feet of fresh, potable water a year.

That would allow the company to fulfill its obligations to an order by state Water Resources Control Board's to replace the 10,730 acre-feet of water per year it has been diverting from the Carmel River aquifer.

"Our major concern with the staff recommendation is that it runs contrary to explicit instructions that we have from other state agencies," said Cal Am spokeswoman Catherine Bowie.

The state Water Resources Control Board, Public Utilities Commission, Department of Fish and Game, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, she said, "are all telling us we have to develop a new water supply."

"How does the state unify its policy on this issue?"

The state Regional Water Quality Control Board has approved the desalination plant, Bowie said, in a process that addressed the water quality issues. Also, the county, in issuing its permit, did not feel the public ownership issue applied to the pilot project because the water it would produce is not being sold for public consumption.

The Coastal Commission "has done a dramatic about-face," she said, and the Coastal Water Project, which seeks to ease Cal Am's dependence on the Carmel River Aquifer, "is being created for an environmental purpose."

On the same day in San Francisco, the state Public Utilities Commission will consider a request by Cal Am for rate hikes to cover the costs of the Coastal Water Project.

A proposed decision on surcharges to cover the project submitted to the PUC by Administrative Law Judge Bert Patrick would allow Cal Am to bill an additional \$20.65 per month next year, rising to \$32.06 in 2008, \$36.58 in 2009, and then decreasing to \$35.98 in 2010 and \$35.41 in 2011, more than doubling the current water rate by 2008.

Patrick has also recommended that Cal Am be directed to file a new application early in 2008 to recover approximately \$5.7 million in preconstruction environmental and engineering costs for the project.

The Coastal Commission will meet at 9 a.m. the Hyatt Regency Embarcadero, 5 Embarcadero Plaza, and the Public Utilities Commission will meet in its chambers at 10 a.m. at 505 Van Ness Ave. #

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