

Packed chamber, public concerns, prompt Contra Costa supervisors to extend hearing on refinery plans

By Tom Lochner *Contra Costa Times*

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MARTINEZ -- After more than two hours of passionate public testimony, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors extended until April 1 a hearing on appeals of a land use permit for a propane recovery project at the Phillips 66 refinery in Rodeo.

The board also postponed to that date consideration of the final environmental impact report for the project, after a June 14 letter from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District that circulated Tuesday asked for more information on toxic air contaminants and an analysis of possible risks to public health.

The Phillips 66 Liquefied Petroleum Gas Recovery Project calls for installing new equipment at the Rodeo refinery to recover and sell propane and butane from refinery fuel gas (RFG) that is a by-product of the refining process.

In two separate appeals, the environmental organization **Communities for a Better Environment** and the law firm of Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger, on behalf of the Rodeo Citizens Association, argued that the environmental report does not adequately study many of the project's potential impacts. They warned that Phillips plans to process more and dirtier oil and that the report overstates the baseline amounts of propane and butane currently produced.

But Phillips 66, in a detailed response earlier this month, characterized many of the appellants' objections as speculative and based on incorrect assumptions. Phillips asserted that its plan would reduce emissions of the pollutant sulfur dioxide. The new equipment would recover propane and butane instead of using it as fuel in refinery boilers or burning off excesses in a process called flaring. Phillips also said it does not need to refine heavier crudes to make the project work and that there are no restrictions on the kinds of crude the refinery can process now or in the future.

Phillips also had argued that the propane and butane recovery project stands alone. But several environmental groups as well as residents of Rodeo, Crockett and surrounding communities, said the project must be considered in connection with other petroleum-related projects. For example, the proposed WesPac oil transfer and storage facility in Pittsburg would receive crude oil by rail and water and redistribute it to area refineries via pipelines.

That notion got a boost with a Jan. 15 letter to Pittsburg city officials from state Attorney General Kamala Harris that slammed a draft environmental impact report for the WesPac project as deficient. The Harris letter, which was widely cited at Tuesday's meeting, said, among other points, that the WesPac environmental report fails to disclose air quality impacts on neighboring communities and that it does not address the risks of accidents that could result from transportation and storage of new types of crude.

The Board of Supervisors chamber was packed Tuesday, and many in the audience were refinery workers.

"They shut down a lot of our work today so we could show support for this project," said George Jacobs of Vacaville, an insulator and mechanic at Phillips 66 Rodeo for 10 years. "If this doesn't go (forward), I'm out of work, on unemployment."

The board set the April 1 date to allow time to address the concerns raised by the public, the air district, the attorney general and the city of Martinez related to the storage and transport of oil in railroad cars.

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