

Cement plant plans switch to oil, coal *

By LEE QUARNSTROM

A switch from natural gas to fuel oil and eventually to coal to fire the kilns and driers at the cement plant in Davenport is under consideration.

Lone Star Industries, operators of the plant, have asked the zoning administrators for permission to switch over now from natural gas to oil as a result of anticipated shortages of natural gas next winter. The Santa Cruz County planning department says the Pacific Gas and Electric Co. predicts severe natural gas shortages for December and January and that cement plants have the lowest priority rating for allocation of the fuel.

Planner John Warren said he is recommending in favor of the conversion to oil, the original fuel used when the plant was opened in 1906. He said the oil would be transported to the cement plant by rail.

The oil would have a high sulfur content, Warren said. But the sulfur is absorbed in the cement-making process, he said, and should have no significant impact on air quality.

Later conversion to coal, as proposed by Lone Star, would be tied to a major expansion of the Davenport facility. These matters will be considered Monday by the county environmental committee, which will determine if an environmental impact report is necessary.

The capacity of the plant would be increased by about 50 per cent under the proposal, Warren said.

He said Lone Star is looking to coal because of its ready availability and because of concern about the long-term availability of natural gas and fuel oil.