

Air Pollution

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PG&E's 'Yellow Plume' Continues

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SALINAS — Pacific Gas and Electric Co. has made dramatic progress toward cleansing the air of pollutants at its Moss Landing Plant, but the "yellow plume" from its smokestacks, the one that raised the public hue and cry, still is there.

The advisory committee to the Monterey-Santa Cruz County Unified Air Pollution Control District on Monday considered a recommendation to impose still more restrictions on the utility in an effort to eliminate the cloud.

But board members decided they know too little about what actually causes the cloud to strike out blindly against it with new rules.

Oxides of nitrogen emitted into the air by the combustion process at the generating plant are known to be a chief con-

tributing factor to the formation of the plume. And committee members at Monday's Salinas meeting considered imposing still more stringent controls on the volume of oxide emission allowable at the plant.

The plume continues despite the fact PG&E already has cut oxide emissions from an average of 1470 parts per million to an average of less than 125.

Thus, the committee decided against forcing further cuts in the emission volume, since it is apparent there are other contributing causes in the formation of the plume.

It decided instead to explore possibilities of a study to determine what those factors are. The staff and some committee members were designated to outline what such a study will accomplish, and to poke around for any government funds that might be available to fund it.

Air Pollution Control Officer Ed Munson thought the study would cost \$50,000 or more. Committeeman Gordon Sinclair asked PG&E representatives if they would consider helping finance the study. They said they would, but couldn't report at that point to what extent their firm would participate.

PG&E officials said they believe the oxides of nitrogen emissions at the Moss Landing plant are the lowest of any major power plant of comparable size in the nation.

Committeemen also were concerned about the blowing of soot at the plant. During most of the year when the plant burns only natural gas, the blowers are turned on only once a month to keep them operative and remove any dust from the combustion system.

But in the winter, when natural gas is not available and the plant burns fuel oil, soot

blowing is almost continuous during the times weather conditions permit it.

The soot particles take on a sulfuric acid content, and there have been complaints of paint damage, although the fuel oil burning goes on only about 200 hours during an average year.

Paul Matthew of PG&E explained that a blower has been installed on the combustion system to blow soot into the boiler, rather than directly up the stack.

In this manner, it was pointed out, some of the soot is burned, its concentration is reduced and particles are made smaller.

Munson thought the blower wasn't enough. He wanted the committee to recommend to the board that the maximum sulfur content of fuel oil burned be one-half of 1 per cent of less. Munson pointed out that sulfur is a main contributor to the formation of ash.

PG&E wasn't opposed to the recommendation, but it wants a chance to get rid of the fuel oil it has on hand — two million barrels of it worth more than \$2-million and with a sulfur content of 1½ per cent.

The oil inventory on hand is enough to last the plant two to three years.

The committee sympathized with the utility's dilemma. It voted to recommend the new low sulfur content, but to not make the regulation effective until July 1, 1972.

PG&E, meanwhile, is attempting to sell the oil so it won't have to be used at all.

It was pointed out that committeemen Earl Moser and Tom Thwaits have been appointed as co-chairmen of a subcommittee to investigate back yard and agriculture burning to determine what regulations might be necessary to control those activities.