

Mayor urged to overrule Kim

By Dave Harado-Stone
Tribune-Herald

The developer of the Puna Geothermal Venture project is urging Mayor Larry Tanimoto to overrule Civil Defense Administrator Harry Kim and approve an emergency response plan submitted in connection with the project.

In a letter last week to Tanimoto, Ormat Energy Systems reg-

ional development manager Maurice Richard suggested the wording of Ormat's permit as well as state and county laws governing the civil defense hierarchy in Hawaii County give Tanimoto — and not Kim — the final say over Ormat's plan.

And if Tanimoto won't step in and approve the plan, Richard says, then he should step aside and let the state's civil defense director approve it.

The county administration is holding firm, insisting that Kim — and Kim alone — will make the decision.

At issue is a response plan — required under the terms of Ormat's geothermal resource permit from the county Planning Commission — to deal with any emergencies that might arise at the 25-megawatt geothermal power plant Ormat plans to build in Pohoiki.

Kim has so far refused to approve the plan as submitted by Ormat. He is objecting to several provisions, including the levels of hydrogen sulfide — a noxious gas generated in geothermal development — and noise at which an emergency should be deemed to exist. The state Department of Health has also suggested the levels be changed, arguing that an emergency would exist at a hydrogen sulfide concentration

half that proposed by Ormat.

Richard says the resulting delays are costing the company about \$10,000 a day as drilling contractors and other personnel wait to begin work on the \$100 million project.

The permit conditions require that the plan be approved by the county's civil defense director.

See GEO PLANT,
Page 8

Ormat argues the wording of its permit as well as state and county laws governing the civil defense hierarchy in Hawaii County give Mayor Larry Tanimoto — and not Civil Defense boss Harry Kim — the final say over Ormat's plan.

GEO PLANT: Administration stands by Harry Kim

From Page 1

Ask just about any Big Islander who the civil defense director is and the response will invariably be Kim, the man Big Islanders turn to for guidance in dealing with everything from lava flows to flooding.

But that's not how Ormat sees it.

In his letter, Richard notes that the state statute providing for the operation of civil defense agencies in the four counties holds that the head of each agency shall be a deputy director of the state Civil Defense Agency appointed by the director of the state agency with the concurrence of the county's council.

The Hawaii County Code identifies the mayor as the deputy director of state civil defense for the Big Island unless a full-time deputy director is appointed. The civil defense administrator, currently Kim, is to act as the chief administrative assistant to the deputy state director, namely the mayor.

Richard himself notes that the County Code also states, however, that the civil defense admini-

strator shall "within the delegated scope of authority, have all the duties and responsibilities of the deputy director (the mayor) subject to the control of the deputy director or his successor."

Nonetheless, Richard told Tanimoto, "the highest position in this county's Civil Defense organization is held by you as a deputy director of the state Civil Defense Agency."

"However," he added, "if it is your position that you are not the director of the Hawaii Civil Defense Agency, we request you take immediate steps to refer this critical matter ... to the director of the state Civil Defense Agency, Adjutant Gen. Alexis Lum."

Tanimoto is on the mainland on a combination business trip and vacation. Managing Director Susan Labrenz said Friday that the mayor has "punted" the matter to her in his absence, and "I have decided that only Harry Kim will approve the plan."

Labrenz said she is convinced Kim's concerns are reasonable and that the intent of the Plan-

ning Commission in approving the conditions in the permit was to have Kim sign off on the emergency response plan.

County Planning Director Duane Kanuha said he has checked with a couple of the commissioners as well as participants in the mediation sessions that preceded the permit approval and all said their understanding was that Kim would have the authority to approve the emergency response plan.

As submitted by Ormat, the plan would trigger an emergency response whenever hydrogen sulfide concentrations reach 20,000 parts per billion at the project's boundary or when noise levels reach 80 decibels.

But Kim notes that state and county permits for the project limit the increase in hydrogen sulfide levels from the plant during normal operation to five parts per billion and require notification whenever the levels at the project boundary exceed 100 parts per billion.

The county permit also limits noise levels from power plant and well field operations to 55

decibels during the day and 45 decibels at night.

In a June 14 letter to Ormat outlining his objections to the plan, Kim said the plan must indicate that "a potential emergency/disaster exists anytime conditions exceed those established" by the state Department of Health permit.

Ormat contends there is a difference between the hydrogen sulfide levels that might constitute a nuisance — most people can smell the gas at concentrations as low as five parts per billion, well below harmful levels — and those levels that constitute an emergency.

But state health officials also take issue with Ormat's numbers.

In an April 7 letter to Kim, state Health Director John Lewin recommended the plan provide for three "action levels" for hydrogen sulfide.

Under Lewin's proposal, concentrations in excess of 100 parts per billion would constitute an alert level. According to Lewin,

the figure is based on the level known to induce eye irritation, a short-term effect, with a 100-fold safety factor.

Lewin said a "warning" level of 1,000 parts per billion would signal further deterioration in air quality and the need for additional abatement and would fall between the level at which short-term effects occur and that at which a serious threat to public health exists.

The DOH "emergency" level would be 10,000 parts per billion, the ceiling used by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health for workers exposed to hydrogen sulfide.

"This is the concentration ... to which it is believed that nearly all humans may be exposed in the working environment day after day (over an eight-hour period) without adverse health effects," Lewin wrote. "Those who are hypersensitive to hydrogen sulfide, including the aged, infants, individuals with predisposing eye and respiratory problems and those who are anemic, may be adversely affected at lower levels."

In his letter to Ormat, Kim also requests the inclusion of maps illustrating worst-case scenarios for "any and all" emergency situations and a section on dealing with geothermal emergencies arising from earthquakes, eruptions, magma intrusions and other natural and man-made disasters.

Labrenz, meanwhile, pointed out that the emergency response plan is not the only hurdle remaining before Ormat can begin work on the project.

She noted, and Kanuha confirmed, that the developer has yet to satisfy six other conditions that must be met before obtaining final plan approval from the Planning Department. While some of the conditions simply require that lists or guidelines be filed with the county, others call for such things as preparation and county approval of a ground water monitoring plan and a landscaping and siting plan.

Also required is publication of a phone number for residents to lodge complaints or inquiries with regard to the power plant's operations.

Hon. Star-Bulletin

6-25-90

Editorial takes 'ironic' view of geothermal value

The editorial "Geothermal helps save the environment," (Star-Bulletin, June 9), was an ironic statement about energy awareness in Hawaii.

To point the finger at Brazil and other Third World countries while ignoring the rainforest obliteration taking place at home is misleading and irresponsible. To bring this double standard to the public's attention is not a "hysterical tactic" as the editorial suggests.

Instead, it illuminates the mania by which we are blindly destroying this lovely land. We are, indeed, destroying our rainforests while simultaneously preaching to Third World nations that they must preserve theirs. There has been no federal Environmental Impact Statement conducted in the Wao Kele O Puna forest, and to ask the U.S. government to subsidize this controversial project without adequate study on how the environment will be affected is sad testimony on how land issues are addressed.

Geothermal energy is not an energy alternative to fossil fuels as the editorial suggests, nor is it "renewable." The oil used to generate electricity in Hawaii is residual oil — the stuff left over

after refining crude oil for transportation fuel. Geothermal energy development will not significantly reduce the amount of oil burned for electricity. There are no plans to close any fossil fuel plants in Hawaii, which clearly shows that geothermal will not reduce our dependence on imported oil.

What Hawaii desperately needs is visionary energy planning, not destructive energy development. The amount of money already spent on research alone for the controversial underwater cable could have been used to install solar panels on every residence on Oahu. Solar and wind power, coupled with strong conservation measures, make geothermal development a poor alternative to sane energy use. Let us put our priorities where they will help the land, not destroy it. Aloha aina!

Paul Faulstich
Oahu Rainforest Action Group

compiled by Thermal Power Co., whereas Ms. Siracusa disputes the validity of the conclusion based on the water quality at the Pahoa Deep Wells located west of Pahoa School.

In fact, my statement that this groundwater system is contaminated with natural geothermal discharge is based on extensive sampling and analyses of groundwater wells on the East Rift that I have conducted on the East Rift.

HON. ADVERTISER

6-25-90

Geothermal protest arrests

Eight at Pahoa demonstration; 1 at Pohoiki

By Hugh Clark

Advertiser Big Island Bureau

PAHOA, Hawaii — At least eight anti-geothermal protesters were arrested yesterday during a demonstration at the entrance to the True Geothermal drilling site four miles southeast of Pahoa High School.

A Puna community leader was arrested and charged Saturday in a protest at another site in Pohoiki. More than 200 people have been arrested in Big Island anti-geothermal-power protests since October.

The protests were organized by the Big Island Rainforest Action Group, which opposes all geothermal-power developments in the state.

Another demonstration is planned for today at Puna Dis-

trict Courthouse in Keaau, where some of the 39 people arrested Dec. 14 are to go on trial.

Police said most of those arrested yesterday were to be charged with simple trespass counts — a violation.

Police said those arrested were held at the site for several hours before being driven by van to Keaau for processing.

On Saturday, Robert Petricci of Leilani Estates was arrested and charged with trespassing while trying to place a flag on top of a drilling rig at the Ormat Energy Systems site at Pohoiki.

His flag featured a skull and crossbones with the words "Death Zone, No Prisoners." Petricci, 34, is vice president of a community group opposing

geothermal development.

Police took him to Keaau for booking and released him on his own recognizance. He is scheduled for a July 17 appearance in Puna District Court to answer the charge.

Petricci's flag was aimed at the University of Hawaii's Scientific Observation Hole project. The UH is using Ormat-controlled land for one of its four exploratory wells to determine the extent of the Puna geothermal source.

Petricci last week was found not guilty of trespassing charges stemming from a Dec. 14 arrest at the True drilling site. He also has taken out nomination papers to run for the Hawaii County Council, saying he will run if no other anti-geothermal candidate surfaces by today's filing deadline.

Geothermal foes return to rain forest for protest; eight arrests reported

By Dave Harada-Stone
Tribune-Herald

WAO KELE O PUNA — Opponents of True Geothermal Co.'s development in the Puna rain forest gathered here again yesterday to vent their frustration with the project and the officials who have supported it in the face of continued community opposition.

As they have in the past, members and supporters of the Big Island Rainforest Action Group chanted, sang and got themselves arrested, all while avoiding any ugly confrontations with police or True representatives.

True workers had extended a wire fence at the gate to the company's drill site, forcing

protesters to walk into the forest for some distance before crossing onto the site. Five made it across and were detained by security guards until police arrived to arrest them on trespassing charges.

But police, more than a dozen of whom arrived late in the day after being called by the security guards, had first to get through the gate.

Protester Tom Brennan locked himself to the gate with a pair of heavy-duty bicycle locks placed around his neck.

True Geothermal workers attempted to extricate Brennan as police stood by. After it became clear that they could not

See PROTEST
Page 8



—T-H photo by Larry Kadooka

PROTESTER TOM BRENNON
... ready to stay chained 'as long as it takes'

PROTEST: Eight arrested at Puna geo site

from Page 1

... through the locks, they took a hacksaw to the parts of the site that the locks were attached. After more than an hour of sawing, Brennan was freed, only to be taken into custody by police on obstruction charges. Also arrested were two reporters who had joined Brennan at the gate.

Brennan, who said he had been prepared to stay chained to the gate for "as long as it takes," said he was angered at the failure of more people — particularly fellow native Hawaiians — to take a stand against geothermal.

"I'm tired of the fact that everyone thinks this is a hippie problem situation," he said.

The crowd of about 150 heard passionate expressions of support by delegates from around the world who had just attended a wildlife conference in Honolulu

Among them was Dave Foreman, founder of the radical environmentalist group Earth First! Foreman has been controversial because of his past advocacy of sabotage to protect the environment. Foreman made no such suggestions yesterday, but his fiery rhetoric drew enthusiastic applause from the demonstrators.

"Today is the most critical day in 3½ billion years of life on this planet," he said. "We are in the middle of World War III," a war he said pits "industrialists against the Earth and those who defend it."

Foreman called geothermal development in Wao Kele O Puna and other projects opposed by environmentalists worldwide the "Auschwitzes and Dachaus" of today, drawing an analogy between environmental devastation and the Nazi concentration camps used in

World War II to kill millions of Jews and other people.

"We are the police of the earth," he said. "We are the ones trying to enforce natural law."

Annie Szecevtc of the San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network told the protesters that their cause has been taken up by people all over the country — and the world.

She said geothermal opponents need to concentrate on the upcoming elections and get candidates for the U.S. Senate race to take a stand on the issue.

"Pressure (Rep. Pat) Saiki to take a stand; tell her her election is on the line," she said. "Pressure (Sen. Daniel) Akaka; tell him his job is on the line."

Other speakers hailed from Alaska, California, Canada, Greece and Brazil.

Geothermal proponents say the projects planned for the

forest area will consume less than 1 percent of Wao Kele O Puna while reducing Hawaii's dependence on imported oil. They also argue that the forest is not as pristine as others in Hawaii.

Opponents, however, say the project will fragment Wao Kele, which they note is the largest remaining expanse of lowland tropical rain forest in the U.S. And they say the forest, while maybe not pristine, is still dominated by native plants, many of which are found nowhere else in the world.

They noted the weeds growing along the side of the road carved to True's site, some growing 10 feet high. By the end of the day, the gate guarding the entrance to the site was festooned with hundreds of the weeds, pulled from the ground by protesters and shoved into the wire fence.

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HAWAII TRIBUNE-HERALD

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Greenpeace slams Inouye

Greenpeace and other environmental groups contend that Wao Kele is the largest remaining expanse of lowland forest in Hawaii.