

Challenge the Potrero Power Plant permit to pollute!



Action Alert

- What** The Regional Water Quality Control Board will consider adopting a discharge permit for Mirant Corp.'s Potrero Power Plant Unit 3. The Water Board's proposed draft permit would allow Mirant to continue operating the polluting plant without replacing 40-year-old cooling technology that causes serious harm to San Francisco Bay. Mirant has not agreed to close the plant when it is no longer needed for electricity.
- Where** Public hearing of the Regional Water Quality Control Board, 1st Floor Auditorium, 1515 Clay Street in Oakland (near 12th Street Oakland City Center BART).
- When** The Board meeting will start at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 10, 2006.

Problem

Potrero Unit 3's outdated cooling system kills aquatic life and pollutes our Bay.

Intake harm

Unit 3 uses 226 million gallons of the Bay for cooling daily. Hundreds of millions of larval fish are sucked into the plant and killed each year. This "entrainment" destroys the equivalent of an estimated 390-940 acres of habitat in the Bay's uniquely important, already impacted ecosystem.

Pollution

Unit 3's cooling system causes pollution. Among other problems, its shoreline outfall digs a hole in polluted sediment next to the plant. PCBs, mercury, and other toxic chemicals buried in the sediment are stirred up, sucked into the nearby cooling intake, and discharged into Bay waters.

PCBs, dioxins, mercury and copper exceed water quality standards in the inadequately diluted shoreline discharge. The mass of five toxic pollutants discharged rivals that discharged by the largest oil refinery in the Bay Area. The discharge exhibits chronic toxicity. Mirant's own consultant reported that the heat pollution discharge causes impacts.

A permit to pollute

The draft permit ignores the Water Board's own expert's advice that the entrainment impacts are significant. It ignores the heat impacts. It blames the toxic pollution on the Bay itself. Instead of stopping the plant's sediment pollution from being re-discharged, it ignores this pollution source, and even gives Mirant a "pollution credit" for PCBs in its intake. It refuses to apply state and federal laws that prohibit the discharge and require modern, available cooling technology. It would permit serious ongoing harm.

Continued next page

Solution

Mirant's Potrero plant can use upland cooling. Others do. This would stop the impacts.

Feasibility

Upland cooling—either dry cooling or a wet/dry cooling tower—is feasible to replace a Bay cooling water volume equal to that used by existing Potrero Unit 3, according to four separate government reviews of cooling at the site done for proposed Potrero Unit 7. Extra space opened up on the site since these reviews makes it even easier to install dry cooling for Potrero Unit 3.

Need

Upland cooling could eliminate the intake of Bay water for cooling the plant and eliminate the discharge. This would eliminate all the impacts of the existing intake and discharge, and also facilitate sediment clean up. Operation of dry cooling would cause no new air pollution.

Reasonableness

Mirant proposed wet/dry cooling for its proposed Potrero Unit 7 in 2003 (licensing for Unit 7 terminated on March 1, 2006). The Chevron Richmond Refinery replaced once-through cooling with cooling towers after the water boards used the same law that applies to Potrero Unit 3 to prohibit Chevron's shoreline cooling discharge—way back in 1986!

Take Action

The Water Board *staff* should have proposed a permit that applies environmental laws. CBE, Bayview-Hunters Point Community Advocates, BayKeeper, and the City and County of San Francisco propose a permit that applies these laws. Our Community Permit would:

- Require replacing Potrero's cooling technology under Clean Water Act § 316(b);
- Require removing Potrero's discharge from the Bay under the discharge prohibitions in the S.F. Bay Basin Plan, the State Thermal Plan, and the McAteer-Petris Act;
- Provide a reasonable schedule for compliance by either switching to upland cooling or closing the aging power plant.

The Water *Board* should:

- Consider the evidence its staff has ignored;
- Reject its staff's proposal to allow known harm to continue unabated;
- Prohibit Potrero's shoreline cooling discharge the same as it did Chevron's;
- Require replacement of the old cooling technology to protect the Bay.

You can help to hold the Water Board accountable for protecting our Bay:

- Attend the May 10th hearing on the Potrero permit!
- Demand action to require modern technology that protects the Bay now!
- Ask your family, friends, neighbors and elected officials to get involved.