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Marin Energy Authority hashes out details of clean energy plan

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Marin Energy Authority board members said Monday they plan to set their "light green" rates - which would provide electricity that is 25 percent from renewable sources - at the same cost that Pacific Gas and Electric Co. is charging.

Board members from Mill Valley, San Rafael and Fairfax met with technical consultants Monday and discussed details of the Marin Clean Energy initiative, which would put the authority in direct competition with PG&E.

The aim is to boost the county's use of renewable energy to reduce the release of greenhouse gases that cause global warming and to reduce the future public costs of complying with state legislation that will soon require all jurisdictions to cut greenhouse gases. According to the California Public Utilities Commission, about 12 percent of the energy that PG&E delivered to customers in 2009 came from renewable sources.

"The goal of our board all along has been to meet or beat our public utility's prices," said Dawn Weisz, Marin Energy Authority's interim director. Weisz said the authority expects to buy electricity cheaply enough from a wholesaler to also cover all of its expenses.

Monday's meeting kicked off what could be a decisive week for the initiative.

On Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors is expected to vote on whether to co-sign a \$1.7 million loan that the authority needs to cover expenses until it begins collecting from ratepayers. On Thursday night, the Marin Energy Authority's board is scheduled to vote on a final contract with Shell Energy North America, a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell, to fill the role of electricity wholesaler.

Before Monday's public session, the authority's board met in a closed meeting with legal counsel to discuss anticipated litigation, and is scheduled to conduct another closed session with counsel prior to Thursday's meeting. So far, the board has not disclosed the reason for the meetings. Last week, PG&E threatened to sue the Marin Municipal Water District if it co-signed the start-up loan, prompting the district to pull the matter off its agenda for Wednesday.

Board members Monday also discussed the plan for sending notices to PG&E customers allowing them to opt out of participating in the clean energy initiative, if that is their choice. Weisz said the first opt-out notice could be mailed "in the next

week or so." A second notice will be mailed 30 days after the first, Weisz said. Customers will be provided with a total of four notices and opportunities to opt-out of the program without penalty.

During a break in the action Monday, board members discussed a second glossy mailer opposing Marin Clean Energy sent out by an organization calling itself the Common Sense Coalition, which is funded by PG&E. The mailer, which features a red banner reading "consumer alert," arrived in some Marin mailboxes on Monday