



For Immediate Release

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MARIN CITY COUNCILS BEGIN DEBATING COMMUNITY CHOICE ENERGY: DRAMATIC INCREASE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY RESPONDS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Marin citizens can learn how to go green to protect the environment as well as their pocketbooks.

Fairfax-Last week two public meetings on Community Choice Energy were held in town council chambers in Mill Valley and Tiburon; the momentum builds with another debate at the Fairfax Town Council May 21st at 6:30pm. At last week's meetings, the County's Sustainability Team presented a PowerPoint presentation about *Marin Clean Energy*, the opportunity Marin residents will have to create a Joint Powers Authority that would obtain 50% or more renewable forms of energy to serve Marin citizens and businesses, instead of letting investor-owned Pacific Gas and Electric buy more fossil fuel and nuclear energy with ratepayer dollars. PG&E has only 13% renewables and admits it will miss the State's deadline for 20% renewables by 2010.

A citizen-controlled energy agency is nothing new. Five states have Community Choice: Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island, News Jersey and California. A quarter of California citizens already enjoy the benefits of community-based energy systems, such as the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), which has been operating successfully since 1927. SMUD provides more renewable energy and efficiency per customer than any utility nationwide, and its rates are 40% lower than PG&E. Community Choice agencies do not own their whole system like public utilities (PG&E continues to own and maintain the power lines); but it offers many advantages over what citizens in Marin are now experiencing. Community Choice allows for low cost public financing options to dramatically increase renewables and efficiency, with little or no rate increase.

California's Community Choice law, AB 117, was approved in 2002 by the state legislature to enable cities and counties to obtain benefits from competition in energy markets, similar to the way big businesses benefit from bypassing utilities and purchasing energy from independent providers.

“The Joint Powers Authority would purchase renewable energy (solar, wind and geothermal) just as PG&E currently purchases energy (mostly fossil fuel),” said Dawn Weisz of the County's Sustainability Team, who coordinates planning efforts for *Marin Clean Energy*. Weisz explained a fact not often perceived by the public — that PG&E does not manufacture most of the energy it sells to customers. PG&E purchases half of its energy from independent generators. It only owns the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant, the old hydroelectric dams in the Sierras, and a gas plant it inherited from Mirant's bankruptcy.

The MCE presentation by Weisz and Omar Pena, Sustainability Planning Aide, is available on line at www.marincleanenergy.info.

According to Weisz, MCE would deliver cheaper renewable energy than PGE because of its non-profit structure and its ability to negotiate contracts at favorable prices in the current market. MCE would make contracts with independent energy providers who are bound by law to deliver on their contracts or face stiff penalties.

PG&E representative Peter Griffiths gave the company's perspective in accordance to the PG&E "Playbook," a document created by consultants several years ago to fight any community that seeks self-determination. The company's mantra is that any independent plan is "too costly and too risky."

In response to the recent meetings, Barbara George, President of Women's Energy Matters (WEM), says, "The creation of Marin's Joint Powers Authority under Community Choice is the most powerful tool we have to cope with global warming. WEM is working to get the word out to a wider audience: don't miss this chance for substantive environmental change."

"Community Choice is far beyond anything PG&E is offering," says George. "I commend PG&E for its new-found commitment to become a green company, but can we leave the future of our children's environment in the hands of a recently bankrupt company just because it says it's committed to the environment in paid advertising?"

At a time when it's good marketing for corporations to proclaim themselves "green," George urges Marin residents to read between the lines and do their own research. She comments that while PG&E pats itself on the back for doing a good job for the environment in its expensive ad campaign, official documents filed at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) show that the company has fallen far short of the State's energy efficiency goals as well as renewables targets. WEM is a public interest representative (intervener) in energy efficiency and power procurement cases at the CPUC.

George recalls, "Ratepayers were charged \$10 billion to bail out the company's risky nuclear power investments following deregulation, and another \$8 billion bailout following PG&E's bankruptcy. We even had to pay huge bonuses that PG&E executives demanded during bankruptcy."

Women's Energy Matters will share information on upcoming meetings, welcomes requests for the organization to make presentations, and is seeking foundation funding to train low-income residents to be able to participate in discussions of Community Choice.

Recently, at the Marin Human Race, Women's Energy Matters outreach team handed out literature about Community Choice to help educate the public. The group will continue its outreach efforts at the "Mom's March" across the Golden Gate Bridge, May 31.

It was pointed out at the recent meetings that Marin County residents would only receive energy from Marin Clean Energy if their city chose to participate. Residents will also have a chance to opt out and stay with PG&E if they prefer. "No matter what side of the issue people line up on, it's important that they do so as informed citizens," says George.

The next meeting is slated for the Fairfax Town Council, Wednesday, May 21, 6:30 p.m. at the Women's Club, 142 Bolinas Road, Fairfax. Upcoming meetings include the Board of Supervisors' Study Session,

June 3; Ross Town Council, June 12, MCE Workshop at Marin County Fair, July 6 and the Novato City Council, July 8th. Check www.marincleanenergy.info for more details and updates.

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About Women's Energy Matters Women's Energy Matters (WEM) is a network of women and men who approach energy issues from a woman's point of view. WEM works for a rapid transition to an efficient, renewable energy system, in order to promote healthy communities and ecosystems and improve international relations. WEM also celebrates the ways women have used their own energy through the ages to work for the public good. Current areas of focus include: Community Choice, Energy Efficiency, and Environmental Justice. See: www.womensenergymatters.org