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MID Electric Partners Forum Highlights Ideas Charging Up Energy Marketplace

State Energy Official, Others Tell Merced County Audience Future of Deregulation Is Taking Shape Today

MERCED, Calif. – Eastern Merced County business people and elected officials were among those who got a glimpse Wednesday of the coming era of energy deregulation at a forum sponsored by the Merced Irrigation District.

"Yes, it's going to start on Jan. 1, 1998, and it's probably not going to be perfect, but you have to start sometime if you're going to reach a goal," said Bill Keese, Chairman of California's Energy Resources, Conservation and Development Commission, featured speaker at the forum.

Approximately 60 current and potential MID electricity customers attended the MID Electric Partners Forum, held at the Castle Airport Aviation and Development Center.

Information was presented on the process of hooking up with MID Electric Services as it expands its retail power delivery system, the transition to a competitive, deregulated energy marketplace, and the opportunities of low-cost power.

Keese and other speakers at the forum emphasized that energy consumers must be prepared to take advantage of the deregulated energy market. Consumers should evaluate all the options available to them, know their past energy usage patterns, and be tough negotiators, they said.

Garith Krause, MID Assistant General Manager, Finance and Electric Services, said the forum was an important step in the process of bringing the benefits of low-cost power to eastern Merced County.

"A rising tide lifts all ships, and the rising tide of low-cost power is going to benefit all of our communities," said Krause. "The availability of economical, reliable electricity will attract business and industry to the region, which means jobs for local residents."

"The district also benefits from providing retail power, because this will generate revenue that will finance the long-term viability of our hydroelectric power generation system."

Forum speaker Karen Mills, Associate Counsel for the California Farm Bureau Federation, said the opportunities for agriculture in the competitive electric utility marketplace are already becoming evident.

"For once, you're seeing electric utilities coming to you with products that fit your needs," said Mills, noting that existing electric utilities are offering agricultural customers lower rates.

She, Keese and other speakers confirmed that MID Electric Services customers will have additional savings opportunities, including the potential of avoiding Competitive Transition Charges (CTCs), and enjoying both a competitive market for electricity and a choice in electricity distribution systems.

She advised energy consumers to make sure any new energy supplier they consider using has a local contact person, and to investigate how long the company has been in business.

Cesar Ancheta, MID Electric Services Manager of Business Development, who will be working with potential customers, assessing their needs and analyzing electricity cost savings, said the transition from PG&E to MID will be a smooth one. Commercial customers can plan on minimal power interruption times during the transition, and have the switch to MID flexibly scheduled on evenings or weekends.

Ancheta and other MID staff members explained that the District will be working to make low-cost power available sooner to potential customers along the planned distribution route.

MID Electric Services delivers power to two retail customers at the present time, Foster Farms and the City of Livingston. Several new customers are in the process of being hooked up, including Yamoto Colony Elementary School in the Livingston Union School District; and stores in the Sam's Food City shopping center in Livingston.

More than 100 potential customers in Eastern Merced County have expressed interest in connecting up with MID Electric Services.

MID's 33-mile power distribution system will deliver reliable, low-cost power to parts of Atwater, Winton, Merced and the entire Castle Airport Aviation and Development Center.

A major milestone in the development of the distribution loop was passed in August when the environmental impact report for the project was approved. Construction is scheduled to commence in early 1998, with Castle served by mid-year and the system completed by late 1998.