



# THE ALAMO SIERRAN

THE ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER - VOL. 43 No. 10 Nov 2009

## Now is the Time to Say No to Nuclear

At this writing, San Antonians and their City Council have just learned of the postponement of the scheduled October 29 vote on \$400 million in bonds for nuclear because a preliminary cost estimate for the STP expansion was \$4 billion higher than anticipated.

In a dramatic about-face, Mayor Julian Castro and CPS Interim General Manager Steve Bartley revealed at a press conference October 27 that they needed time to further negotiate with contractor Toshiba to get the price down and so were delaying the bond vote until January. In response to a question from a reporter, it was revealed that CPS knew about the higher estimate but said

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## Solar SA's Sinkin at Sierra Club

The El Paso area gets the most solar energy in Texas, according to Lanny Sinkin, Executive Director of Solar San Antonio, who spoke to a large crowd at October's Alamo Group meeting. Sinkin also noted that the Texas energy grid, hitherto independent of the country's two other grids, may eventually become connected at Clovis, New Mexico, where the three grids come together.

Sinkin said that San Antonio now has 44 solar photovoltaic installations for a total of just under 360 kW of energy. CPS Energy, San Antonio's utility, has so far committed to only 41 MW of solar with a modest goal of 100 MW by 2020. The city of San Antonio's Mission Verde program

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## A Word from the Chair by Loyd Cortez

I want to remind our members about the upcoming December 15th Christmas Party that will be held at the Lions Field hall on Broadway. It will be a potluck, so bring that special dish of yours to share. Details will be provided in the December newsletter and on our Group website.

Two ExCom members have decided not to run for another term next year, and there is one unfilled position. For that reason, we are asking all members to consider serving on this board. My term is also expiring, but I have again decided to submit my name for consideration as a member of ExCom. Can you volunteer two hours of your time each month to attend our ExCom meetings? If the answer is yes, please contact Wendell Fuqua (wendell.fuqua@utsa.edu, 375-0748) to submit your application, consisting of a biographical statement not longer than 100 words stating why you should be considered a candidate for ExCom.

Another reminder: please get your 2010 Sierra Club calendars if you have not done so. The cost for either the wall or desk calendar is \$15. If you cannot make it to the Witte to pick one up, I can mail either one for an additional \$3.00 to cover postage. Send me an email or call if you want a calendar mailed to you.

My thanks to those individuals who were able to attend our Social at the Candlelight Cafe. Our next Social will be at La Fogata on November 27th. Due to time constraints during the Christmas holidays, we have decided not to hold an official social in December, but we do have an open invitation from a member to join his group for their Christmas party. See this newsletter for more details on the La Fogata event and the other Christmas party.

**General Meeting: 7:00 P.M., 3rd Tuesday each month at the Witte Museum located at 3801 Broadway just south of Hildebrand Ave. Socializing begins at 6:40, program at 7 P.M.**

### November 17, 2009: Climate Change and Texas

John Nielsen-Gammon, Professor in the Texas A&M Department of Atmospheric Sciences, and the Texas State Climatologist, will discuss the impact of climate change on Texas.

### December 15, 2009: Christmas Potluck Supper

Please join us at the Lions Field facility on Broadway just south of Mulberry for a potluck. Bring own plate and utensils to save resources and reduce the waste stream. Please note that the event begins at 6:30 PM.

## ~~Earth Share Partners With H-E-B~~

~~We are pleased to announce that H-E-B has selected Earth Share of Texas to be the beneficiary of its in-store coupon promotion for November, in recognition of Texas Recycles Day. This means that customers can tear off and add check out coupons worth \$1, \$3, or \$5 to their total bill to support environmental work in the San Antonio area.~~

~~H-E-B has supported many Earth Share of Texas organizations with corporate grants or in-kind contributions. The November tear pad promotion enables H-E-B customers to support the environmental program work of more than two dozen Earth Share of Texas~~

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## Safety Should Come First With Nuclear Reactors

*Editor's Note: The following guest editorial was submitted for publication in October to the San Antonio Express-News.*

Safety should be a primary concern when it comes to building nuclear reactors, but safety has been barely discussed by CPS Energy or the media. The health of workers and communities downwind from the reactors are at risk if safety concerns are not adequately addressed, with CPS ratepayers paying for preventable mistakes.

The Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) ruled that at least five major flaws in the license application for

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**The Earth Share promotion was canceled in order to implement a program to help the Fort Hood massacre victims and victims' families.**

**~~Earth Share & H.E.B. Continued~~**

~~organizations. The Sierra Club Foundation will benefit, because the contributions will be divided among Earth Share of Texas organizations with program work in San Antonio and South Texas.~~

~~Look for the Earth Share of Texas display and tear off coupons at the check-out stands in more than 50 H.E.B. and Central Market stores in the San Antonio area from late October through early December. And help support Earth Share of Texas and the Texas environment!~~

**Solar SA Continued**

has a more ambitious goal of 250 MW by 2020. CPS Energy has rebates available for solar installations. Information on the rebates can be accessed by going to CPS's website.

Sinkin stated that Austin Energy has just signed a contract for solar at 16.5 cents a kWh. The cost of solar energy is predicted to decrease to 5 cents/kWh by 2015.

State Representative Mike Villarreal's recently passed House Bill 1937 will enable homeowners to economically weatherize homes and add solar or geothermal energy by incorporating the capital cost into property taxes. Kinks in the implementation of the bill are expected to be worked out shortly.

One concern of Solar San Antonio is the shortage of skilled labor to do the quality work required to place solar panels on rooftops. To that end, Solar San Antonio put together a recently completed training class for solar installers. Sinkin indicated that the WellMed Company has committed to installing solar hot water heaters on low-income homes.

Sinkin also said that Solar San Antonio has identified various parking lots in San Antonio that can pilot a plug-in program for electric vehicles, which are expected to hit San Antonio streets in increasing numbers within the next year or two. Sinkin also indicated that the Nissan Company has expressed an interest in making San Antonio a rollout city for its Leaf electric vehicle, which will go 100 miles on a single charge. The Leaf will be available for purchase by the end of 2010.

Sinkin spoke of the Rifkin Plan for San Antonio, recently unveiled. Jeremy

Rifkin has projected that 4000 megawatts of energy could come from solar rooftops in San Antonio. That would equal two-thirds of CPS's total energy capacity of 6000 MW. The efficiency of rooftop solar panels can be increased to 37 percent with the use of concentrators, which will be on the market by next year, according to Sinkin.

Solar San Antonio is a non-profit organization devoted to the furtherance of solar energy, founded ten years ago by Sinkin's father, philanthropist William Sinkin.

**Safety First Continued**

two more reactors at the South Texas Project (STP) must be addressed in a March, 2011, hearing. CPS/NRG's failure to adequately address important safety and water-related issues in their license application could cause expensive delays, as occurred 30 years ago.

Having enough water to cool two more reactors at the STP is a huge concern. This year's drought has been called more severe than the 1950s drought of record, and drought affects both surface and groundwater. Nuclear power is the most water-intensive way to generate electricity. The ASLB ruled that CPS/NRG failed to analyze groundwater availability and the impact of withdrawing amounts in excess of their current permits. CPS owes it to Texas to make sure the water available is adequate for two more reactors, without limiting access to drinking water and water for crops, ranchers and businesses. Rice farmers are already being told they may have to cut back their crops next year. Which do we need more: power from nuclear reactors that could be generated by other less water-intensive means, or food?

The ASLB validated concerns of residents near the nuclear site in ruling that CPS/NRG had failed to adequately analyze the impacts of radioactive contamination of water. Increasing radioactivity in the reactors' main cooling reservoir has been documented, along with leakage of radioactive water through the unlined bottom of the reservoir into groundwater and nearby surface-water bodies, including the Colorado River and Gulf Coast estuaries. The ASLB ruled that CPS/NRG failed to consider how adding two more reactors could increase radioactivity and how leakage could

impact the environment and public health. If the ASLB believes there are unresolved water and safety concerns worthy of a legal hearing, maybe it's time that City Council and CPS stop pursuing the ill-conceived nuclear reactors.

Since 9/11, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission recognizes the vulnerability of nuclear plants to explosions and fires from impact of large airliners. In terms of radiation releases, these plants are potential weapons of mass destruction if explosions or fires disable the complex array of pipes and pumps needed to cool nuclear reactor fuel and spent-fuel cooling water. Loss-of-coolant accidents are nightmare scenarios. It remains uncertain if the NRC will approve STP plans for handling large-scale explosions and fires. And it is doubtful any nuclear plant can be designed to maintain essential cooling if attacks happen on a 9/11 scale. STP has also failed to address how a severe radiological accident or major explosion or fire at one unit would impact the remaining three units.

Approving \$400 million more for risky nuclear reactors makes no sense. We can avoid skyrocketing electric bills by getting out of the nuclear expansion now, while we can still recoup our losses through energy efficiency and solar, wind and geothermal energy. Our buildings could be retrofitted to use less energy and lower electric bills, creating local businesses and jobs. And we could sleep better not worrying about excessive water consumption, radioactive water or terrorist attacks that could spread radioactivity across Texas.

**No to Nuclear Continued**

nothing until an aide of Mayor Castro's elicited the information from them.

The likelihood is great that CPS would have kept the information to themselves until after the bond vote.

The withholding of information from Council and from the public is common with our municipal utility. Groups like the Sierra Club have complained about CPS's lack of transparency and accountability. This is one more instance of that, and a major one. Even now, CPS is refusing to say just what figure Toshiba is giving for cost. CPS says its people will fly to Japan to negotiate that secret figure down, but what validity will any new figure they come up with have anyway? Another cost estimate is expected at the end of the year, and yet more estimates will come

until proposed construction begins in 2012. More bond issues will come, strapping the heavily indebted CPS even more, and bringing the utility and perhaps the city close to financial disaster.

After 2012, costs may continue to rise, even with a firm price contract, as often happens in situations like this. Interveners in the licensing of STP 3 and 4 have thus far had five contentions accepted for hearing by the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, more perhaps than for any other nuke in the making. Addressing those concerns will undoubtedly mean higher costs.

Council has thus far waffled and cowered in the face of nuclear. Like sheep, each member has gone with the flock, not daring to say no to the biggest and perhaps most ill-advised venture in the city's history, ignoring the less expensive and greener alternatives that would more than make up for the loss of \$276 million thus far spent for 'design and engineering' of a nuclear expansion that was supposedly pre-designed and ready to go.

The time for leadership has come. Council should say enough is enough and turn the postponement into a cancellation. Throwing good money after bad is foolish, and San Antonio deserves better. Council should require that CPS look at the energy alternatives it has so far largely ignored and derided, and implement them earnestly. Council should become the watchdog of a utility that has for too long done its own thing and avoided Council scrutiny. It should give CPS leadership an early retirement and replace them with forthright and progressive executives who answer to Council and the public openly and regularly. Council should also play a major role in the selection of CPS board members and not just rubber-stamp selections by the current board.

### *In Memory of Jon Allan*

This region lost a champion of the natural world with the death of Jon Allan on September 27th due to brain cancer. He was an accomplished virologist and a soft-spoken and gentle man of high integrity who valued the beauty of the Texas Hill Country. We can be thankful when individuals such as Jon unexpectedly step forward to provide leadership on environmental issues. Jon and other Helotes residents successfully opposed

the siting of a Wal-Mart store on Scenic Loop in an environmentally sensitive area. Jon helped to organize the Helotes Heritage Association and served as Mayor of Helotes from 2005 to 2007. His objectives as Mayor included the enactment of more sustainable development policies, the protection of trees, and an increase in park space for Helotes. During his tenure, Jon unfortunately had to spend a lot of effort to cajole the various government agencies to work together to contain and manage the mulch fire that erupted on the edge of the Helotes community. He lost his reelection bid by a few votes in 2007 but left a legacy of caring for people and the environment.

## OUTINGS

**SAT-SUN, NOV 14-15: HILL COUNTRY STATE NATURAL AREA BEGINNER BACKPACK**  
 Have you ever wanted to try backpacking, but never had the time or opportunity? Then this trip is for you. No prior experience is necessary, only a willingness to camp out overnight in a tent and complete a short hike with pack. We will backpack to one of the primitive camping areas, a distance of about three miles. This will give you ample time to adjust to your equipment and get a good taste of how much fun backpacking can be. Experienced backpackers will assist you and share their many years of backpacking experiences. As we sit around the virtual campfire on Saturday night, we will hear many tales of outdoor adventures. The trip will start early Saturday morning and end early Sunday afternoon. A mandatory meeting will be held the week prior to go over equipment and supplies needed, as well as the trip plans. Individuals provide their own equipment, food and water. Difficulty: EASY. Participants pay own park entrance and camping fees. Donation to Sierra Club suggested. Signup deadline is November 1. Leaders are Bill Rogers (rogers@uthscsa.edu) and Terry Platt (taplatt@earthlink.net).

**SAT, NOV 21: ALL OF FRIEDRICH PARK DAY HIKE**

It's back by popular demand. Walk them all. Route follows Main Loop to Vista Loop, and includes Fern Dell and even Juniper Barrens and the Water Trail. Meet at 8 AM in the parking lot at 21935 Milsa. Difficulty: moderate. Length is about 4 miles including

a couple of steep sections on the Fern Dell trail, so wear sturdy hiking shoes. Bring water and join us (optional) for coffee afterwards at Starbucks in Leon Springs. Donations to Sierra Club accepted. Call leader Stan Drezek (493-0939) to sign up.

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**Sierra Socials**  
 (Contact Loyd Cortez 674-9489 or [loydcortez@earthlink.net](mailto:loydcortez@earthlink.net) if planning to attend.)

**NOVEMBER 27, La Fogata, 2427 Vance Jackson Rd, 6-8 PM.**  
 Join us on the patio for good Mexican food and a margarita.

**DECEMBER 4, VFW Post 76, 10th St. west of Broadway at the river, 7-12 PM.**  
 Open invitation from member to join Alamo City Rivermen for their Christmas party. Casual dress-jeans ok. No food served, so eat before you come. Drinks can be purchased. There may be a band and possible dancing. A gate provides access to the Riverwalk.

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### About Solar

A fact sheet about solar energy, "SOLAR ENERGY: READY FOR BASELOAD," is available on the Alamo Group's website by going to the Home page, clicking on Environment and then clicking on Energy. The sheet can be downloaded and distributed to interested parties.



# MEETING DATES AND CONTACT INFO

General Meeting: .....	3rd Tuesday 7 p.m. ....	Jerry Morrissey .....	497-5470
Executive Committee Meeting: .....	3rd Thursday, 7 p.m. ....	Loyd Cortez .....	674-9489
Newsletter Submissions: .....		Fred Wills .....	fredwills@att.net
Political Committee Meeting: .....	2nd Thursday, 7 p.m. ....	Russell Seal .....	289-9008
Newsletter Mail Party: .....	2nd Tuesday, 7 p.m. ....	Jim Stewart .....	692-0727
Outings Committee Meeting: .....	1st Wednesday every 2 months, 7 p.m. ....	Scott Wolfe .....	724-2707
Conservation Committee Meeting: .....	1st Thursday, 7 p.m. ....	L. Van Coppenolle .....	492-4620

### ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OFFICERS & MEMBERS

Loyd Cortez .....	Chair Person .....	674-9489
Peggy Day & MaryEllen Garcia .....	Secretary	
Margaret (Peggy) Day .....		829-5632
Wendell Fuqua .....		373-0748
Hector Gonzalez .....		226-6069
MaryEllen Garcia .....		344-1581
Fred Wills .....		673-9566
Scott Wolfe .....		724-2707
Teresa Ronquillo .....		844-8720
Sharon Dukes (non voting) Treasurer .....		828-3721

#### ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACTS

Programs .....	Eloise Stoker .....	828-0919
Fundraising .....	Paula Stone .....	393-7351
Publicity .....	Teresa Ronquillo .....	844-8720
Mailings .....	Jim Stewart .....	692-0727
Membership .....	Loyd Cortez .....	674-9489
Newsletter .....	Fred Wills .....	673-9566
Website .....	Richard Alles .....	494-2088

#### COMMITTEE CONTACTS

Outings Chair .....	Scott Wolfe .....	724-2707
Political Committee .....	Russell Seal .....	289-9008
Outreach & Education .....	Carolyn Wells .....	271-0640

#### CONSERVATION CONTACTS

Conservation Chair .....	L. Van Coppenolle .....	492-4620
Assistant Chair .....	R. Carroll-Bradd .....	216-6125
Endangered Species .....	Fred Wills .....	673-9566
Fluoridation .....	L. Van Coppenolle .....	492-4620
Organic Gardening .....	Dave Klar .....	495-2148
Recycling .....	Laurie Posner .....	510-917-0097
Tree Conservation .....	Richard Alles .....	494-2088
Volunteer Coordinator .....	Jerry Morrissey .....	497-5470
Water Issues .....	Jerry Morrissey .....	497-5470

#### U.S. CONGRESSPERSONS

Charlie Gonzalez (210) 472-6195  
 Lamar Smith (210) 821-5024  
 Henry Cuellar (210) 271-2851  
 Ciro Rodriguez (210) 922-1874

#### CITY COUNCIL

Mayor: Julian Castro; 207-7060;	mayor@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 1: Mary Alice P. Cisneros; 207-7279;	district1@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 2: Ivy R. Taylor; 207-7278;	district2@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 3: Jennifer V. Ramos; 207-7064;	district3@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 4: Phillip A. Cortez; 207-7281;	district4@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 5: David Medina, Jr.; 207-7043;	district5@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 6: Ray Lopez; 207-7065;	district6@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 7: Justin Rodriguez; 207-7044;	district7@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 8: W. Reed Williams; 207-7086;	district8@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 9: Elisa Chan; 207-7325;	district9@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 10: John G. Clamp; 207-7276;	district10@sanantonio.gov

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[www.alamosierraclub.org](http://www.alamosierraclub.org)

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 San Antonio, Texas 78209

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## Membership

**Yes**, I want to help safeguard our nation's precious natural heritage. My check is enclosed.

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Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1.00 for your Chapter newsletter.

#### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

	INDIVIDUAL	JOINT
INTRODUCTORY	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	
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CONTRIBUTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175
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STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
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