

New PUC member: energy is the main concern

"I think that energy is the largest single problem related to the environment and the economy which is facing us now. All kinds of good ideas are generated, but they are difficult to implement. The most powerful method of implementation is the Public Utilities Commission."

That is the reason that Claire Dedrick, Menlo Park conservationist and former Secretary of Resources for California, has taken on a new job as member of the California Public Utilities Commission.

As one of five commission members, Mrs. Dedrick will be voting on issues that affect key aspects of our lives: how much do we pay for gas, electricity, telephone and sometimes water service? Will we be able to continue riding the train to San Francisco? In case of shortage, who will get the scarce supplies of natural gas? What new sources of energy will be developed? What conservation measures will be required of homeowners, businesses and utilities?

Taking time out from a busy schedule of public appearances, hearings, and studying more than 200 cases for which she has been assigned primary responsibility, Mrs. Dedrick talked enthusiastically about some of the new programs and opportunities to save energy:

—Co-generation, or use of waste heat from power plants to provide process heat for industries is a "real winner," she said.

—Lifeline rates, which provide amounts of energy needed to sustain life at low rates and rise with the amount of energy used, have been instituted.

—Mandatory conservation programs have been initiated in all the major energy utilities.

—Development of alternative energy sources such as solar and wind is being encouraged through rules and regulations applying to utilities.

The regulation of public utilities is the commission's basic responsibility, but from there its functions become complicated, Mrs. Dedrick explained. What it actually regulates is privately-owned utilities serving the public. For example, it regulates the California Water Service Company but not the San Francisco Water Department; it regulates the Southern Pacific and Greyhound companies, but not SamTrans. It even regulates party boats, but not taxis, she commented.

The rationale for regulation is that the utility is allowed to operate a monopoly in its service area, and in return must accept controls over its rates and service. "The tradeoff for having a monopoly is regulation of rates and service," Mrs. Dedrick noted. The commission's objective is to make sure the rate payer is paying the least amount that will guarantee continued service by the utility—to keep the companies healthy but not allow them to charge inequitable rates.

Ironically, the Public Utilities Commission—which is now pondering a request

by the Southern Pacific to drop its Peninsula commute service—was first established in 1912 under the Hiram Johnson administration for the purpose of controlling the Southern Pacific. Then it was called the Railroad Commission. All the other functions have been added since then.



MADAME COMMISSIONER. Claire Dedrick, the newest member of the California Public Utilities Commission, is shown relaxing by one of her bonsais in Menlo Park. Mrs. Dedrick, who came to her new post via an impressive conservation career on the Peninsula and the offices of Vice President of the Sierra Club and Secretary of Resources for California, enjoys returning occasionally to see old friends and check up on her bonsais and cat which are living with a friend until she returns.

Although Mrs. Dedrick is not allowed to discuss that pending application, she acknowledged that she is one of two commissioners assigned primary responsibility for following the case. She has also attended all the Peninsula hearings on the abandonment. "I was so proud of my home town," she commented. "Generally few people attend our hearings. Here people came out in droves."

"The most exciting thing" the commission is working on now is co-generation, according to Mrs. Dedrick. This is the use of waste heat from power plants to provide either process heat or process steam to industries. She explained that gas turbines burn at 3000 degrees, and the actual power generation only lowers the temperatures

from 1800 to 900 degrees.

Thus, actual power generation only uses one-third of the available heat; "The rest is thrown away," Mrs. Dedrick said. "A cleverly designed co-generation system can take advantage of almost all that heat."

The Pacific Gas and Electric Company

require high technology; it utilizes standard equipment such as boilers and turbines which can be hooked together by an intelligent engineer.

Mrs. Dedrick is proud of the accomplishment of the commission over the last couple of years in inverting utility rates so that gas and electricity now cost more per unit for large uses rather than less. "The less you use the less you pay per unit," she commented.

The commission has instituted a priority system for allocating natural gas in case of future shortages that will protect the gas supply for five million homes in California. These are the least flexible users, and can least afford to convert to other sources of fuel, Mrs. Dedrick explained.

Another area where the commission is promoting conservation and wise use of energy is through its mandatory conservation program with the major energy utilities. For example, the Pacific Gas and Electric Company has several major projects:

—reducing line voltage by about five per cent for enormous energy savings as well as longer life for appliances.

—performing energy audits for industries to "save lots of kilowatts"

—insulation programs and insulation audits of homes on request

Mrs. Dedrick is immersed in a host of other energy projects—an evaluation of liquefied natural gas, development of solar and alternate sources of energy, and some of her old environmental issues on the side.

Having moved from her home off the Alameda to Sacramento shortly after Governor Brown took office, she is now reverse commuting. When not traveling, she spends weeks in the San Francisco area and joins her husband in Sacramento on weekends. In the city she lays claim to a "neat office" in the state building—at the top of the arches looking out at the state Bear flag.

Meanwhile, her house is rented out, but she still says, "We'll be back."

By Marion Softky

Subscribe!

\$8 within our circulation area, \$12 outside.

BEGINNERS



**LAS LOMITAS SCHOOL DISTRICT
ARNETT COMMITTEE**