Minnesota Refinery to Cut Emissions

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Environmental groups and Flint Hills Resources announced an agreement Tuesday to cut greenhouse gas emissions and smog-forming air pollution from the company's planned upgrade at Minnesota's largest oil refinery.

Flint Hills said it agreed to additional energy efficiency and monitoring that will cut greenhouse gases by about 52,000 metric tons from its initial proposal for its Pine Bend Refinery in suburban Rosemount. The company also agreed to donate $1 million to Project Green Fleet, which has been working since 2005 to reduce particulates and ozone emissions from school buses and other diesel-powered vehicles.

In return, the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and the Environmental Integrity Project said they won't contest the refinery's air permit applications, which require approval from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

It's one of the largest in the Upper Midwest and produces about half of Minnesota's transportation fuels and a significant share of the fuel used in the Dakotas and Wisconsin, Flint Hills spokesman Jake Reint said. It processes crude oil from Canada and North Dakota.

The proposed $400 million project is aimed at letting the refinery produce closer to its design capacity of 320,000 barrels per day.

Reint said this is the first time the refinery has reached an agreement with potential opponents before the traditional regulatory process, and that it will save time and resources for both sides.

Scott Strand, executive director of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, said their goals remains shifting away from fossil fuels entirely, and particularly oil from Canadian tar sands. But he said the Rosemount refinery and other petrochemical plants are expanding, so it's necessary to take steps now to reduce the impacts on air quality.

The refinery is part of Wichita, Kan.-based Flint Hills Resources LLP, a subsidiary of Koch Industries Inc.

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