

Carter aides stress need for standby gas rationing

By Ed Pope
Staff Writer

Two aides to President Carter brought the message to Santa Clara County Friday that any "equitable and sensible" national energy policy must include a standby gasoline rationing program.

Both Anne Wexler, special assistant to Carter, and Charles Warren, the president's chief counsel for environmental quality, cited the need for such a measure.

Their statements, including Ms. Wexler's admonition that "no policy can be successful unless we get your support," were obvious pleas for support for rationing.

Ms. Wexler, who was deputy undersecretary of commerce and appointed to her present job May 1, noted that Carter's initial program was turned down by Congress, "but we will go back to Congress soon with another plan," she reported.

Ms. Wexler visited the county on the invitation of Dom Cortese, chairman of the county board of supervisors, to meet with supervisors and representatives of business, labor and the petroleum industry.

"We were frightened by the sudden impact of the gasoline shortage in May and its potential adverse effect on business and industry in Santa Clara County," commented Peter Giles, president of the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group. "We were equally puzzled when it blew over and shifted to the East. What kind of contingency plan exists to offset that kind of situation should it return?" he asked.

Ms. Wexler assured him that a task force of congressional and White House leaders is working on the problem. She said the administration views this as a "good chance to get standby rationing."

Warren echoed that need. He added that, "We have to develop an early-warning system, including a three-month forecast of crude supplies."

He said he believes the odd-even rationing system and the

Trying to trade food for oil could boomerang with the United States losing 30 percent of its crude imports

state's emergency fuel supply will enable consumers to make the necessary adjustment. "California motorists have already dramatically reduced their driving," he noted.

A lot will depend, he said, on continued conservation and how Californians react to "rosy statements" that have been made lately about the future availability of gasoline.

"If people go back to their old driving habits, they will find themselves back in long lines at the pumps."

He warned also that a radical drop in supply would require mandatory rationing.

Cortese brought up the subject of the United States' clout in the international community and the now-popular concept of exchanging "food for crude."

But Ms. Wexler dismissed such proposals as "not possible — but beyond that, the United States just doesn't operate that way."

"There is enough disruption in the energy system," she asserted, "we do not want to disrupt the agricultural industry. Agricultural exports are higher than ever," she said, "and are an increasingly important part of our overseas trade."

To the suggestion that the United States explore some kind of anti-trust action against the nations that meet to fix oil prices, Warren cautioned:

"The immediate response of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) would be to cut off all oil shipments to the United States. What this country would do about a 30 percent cutback of oil, I have no idea."

He added that "oil has greater value in the ground

than in automobile engines, for use as fertilizer to enrich the soil of a world that in the next two decades will have 2½ billion more people to feed. If I were an adviser to OPEC, I'd have to counsel them to leave it in the ground," he said.

Warren provided the only levity in an otherwise grim report when he was asked by Supervisor Rod Diridon to comment on a proposed county ordinance requiring solar hot water heating in new construction and homes that are resold.

"Let me see if I understand this," said Warren, tongue-in-cheek. "You are asking me to comment on the wisdom of an ordinance that the board of supervisors will vote on Monday."

To the ensuing roar of laughter, Warren commented, "The only energy source that is going down in cost is solar. It is still not quite economic for most installations, but it undoubtedly will be soon."

Warren, a former assemblyman from Beverly Hills, then noted that California accounts for 45 percent of all solar units sold in the United States, "and that is something of which we can all be proud. I think I will content myself with that answer," he concluded.

In a briefing on the status of the energy crisis, Warren made these points:

✓ At the energy summit in Tokyo, Carter pledged this country will limit its oil imports by 1985 to no more than it imported in 1977. That was 8.7 million barrels a day. The import figures for 1978 and so far in 1979, he said, are 8.1 and 8.4 million barrels.

✓ According to the Central Intelligence Agency, the known and potential petroleum reserves in the world are 1.4 trillion barrels. "At our current rate of consumption, we will exhaust those reserves in 38 years."

✓ U.S. oil companies are actually paying higher prices for crude from other countries than they are from OPEC. The