



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

"Mrs. Claus," Yvonne Wingard of Colby, looked at Mary Grace Kim as she reached out for her mother as she and her sister, Anna, sat on Gary Wingard "Santa Claus" lap Monday evening in downtown Hoxie. The Wingards volunteered their time to welcome visitors and guests of the Hoxie Area Chamber of Commerce's holiday kick-off and downtown lighting ceremony. The girls are the children of Pastors Daniel and Hyun Kim, pastors of the Methodist Church in Hoxie.

Winter hits Kansas

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Gov. Kathleen Sebelius welcomed the winter season Thursday by declaring a disaster emergency, ensuring that resources are available to counties hit hard by the season's first major snow and ice storm.

The disaster emergency applies to 27 counties in the south-central, southeast and northeast parts of the state. It allows for additional state resources to be provided to counties responding to the storm, and also expedites restoration of electrical power by resolving issues related to additional hours of service needed by employees serving in response roles.

"We want local communities to be able to respond quickly and effectively to the storm, which is why we'll be providing state resources to help their response," Sebelius said.

Kansas Emergency Management activated the State Emergency Operations Center on Wednesday in anticipation of the storm, which began that afternoon with freezing rain, sleet, snow, high winds and temperatures below freezing.

Spokeswoman Sharon Watson said there were no reports of power outages Thursday night, as the storm churned its way across the border into Missouri.

The weather service canceled its winter storm warning just after 9 p.m.

Watson predicted some damage in the southeast corner of the state, but said estimates would not be available until the storm has passed. She said the main problem was snow-packed roads across the state. "It was coming down pretty good," said Tony Bauer at the Pittsburg Truck 'N Travel in southeast Kansas.

Bauer said most truck drivers and many motorists parked early in the evening, rather than driving into the night. He said semitrailers were lining up in the parking lot as snow

began accumulating.

"A lot of them say it's just something you have to deal with," Bauer said.

The National Weather Service was predicting up to 16 inches of snowfall east of the Kansas Turnpike in southern Kansas. More was predicted across the border, resulting in dozens of traffic accidents and at least one fatality.

Flood warnings were declared in eight southwest and south-central Missouri counties. The weather service reported up to 2 feet of water on roads in Ozark and Howell counties, and flash flooding in Douglas County.

Officials along the border remained concerned that high winds could knock down ice-coated trees and power lines. A wind advisory was issued for western Missouri for the overnight hours, and the National Weather Service predicted gusts of up to 45 mph.

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Rally against proposed plants

TOPEKA (AP) — Opponents prepared for a Statehouse rally against a western Kansas utility's plan to build three coal-fired power plants for generating electricity as the state delayed a decision on granting a permit the project needs to move forward.

Sunflower Electric Power Corp. hopes to build the plants near an existing plant outside Holcomb, in Finney County, increasing its generating capacity nearly seven times. Much of the power would be exported to Colorado.

Environmental and other groups want Gov. Kathleen Sebelius to block the construction of any new coal-fired plants, arguing that such plants will increase pollution, contribute significantly to global warming and discourage or even prevent the development of wind energy. Their rally is scheduled for 11 a.m. Saturday.

The state Department of Health and Environment has drafted a proposed permit for the Sunflower project, saying the utility would comply with federal pollution-control standards. KDHE had planned to take public comments until Friday but extended the deadline to

Dec. 15, a move that encouraged critics.

"I think the opposition has grown as more people have learned about it," said Kim Hanson, a member of True Blue Women, a Prairie Village group that is helping to organize the Statehouse rally. "The longer that we can extend comment period, the more we can educate people about the true pros and cons of building more power plants."

Sunflower spokesman Steve Miller said the utility is disappointed with the delay but understands that its project has sparked public interest.

"We've been at this process for a long, long, long time," he said. "We think there's been enough time for people to comment."

KDHE Spokesman Joe Blubaugh said Secretary Rod Bremby's decision to extend the public-comment period should not be interpreted as a comment about the agency's position on the permit.

"It just really comes down to, there's been significant interest in the issue," Blubaugh said. "He just wanted to make sure that everyone who was interested had an opportunity to comment on it."

Among the groups asking Sebelius to impose a moratorium on coal-fired plants are True Blue Women and the Sierra Club.

"Governor Sebelius is considering all options as we seek to balance energy development and conservation in our state. At this point, we're still gathering information," Sebelius spokeswoman Nicole Corcoran said Thursday.

In September, Sebelius said she would consider a moratorium if KDHE and an energy council she appointed two years ago recommended it as part of a comprehensive energy plan.

During a KDHE hearing last month, Sunflower executives urged the agency not to use the permitting process to set a broad policy on coal-fired plants, saying such decisions should be left to the Legislature.

Miller said the utility has followed state and federal requirements.

Finney County officials have backed the project, seeing the potential for as many as 2,000 construction jobs, as well as a permanent expansion of the local economy.

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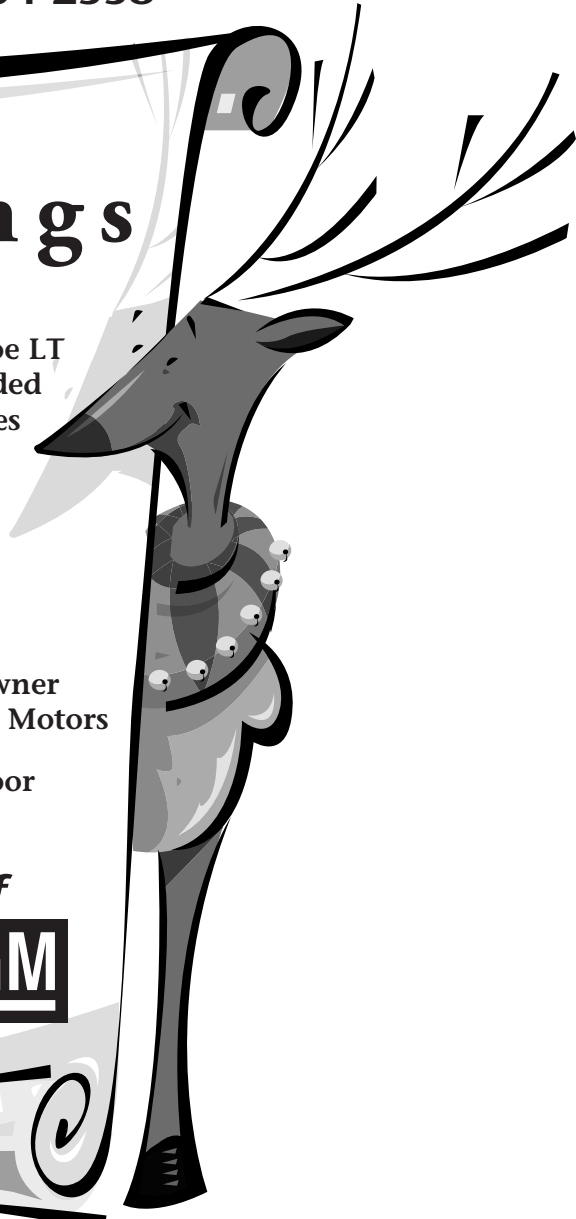
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