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More Than 7,000 Petition Signatures Delivered to Kern County Planning Commission from Coalition Opposed to Expanded Oil and Gas Drilling

Proposed ordinance would allow more than 67,000 new toxic wells to be drilled, many near homes and schools; Planning Commission to review ordinance at Feb. 11 meeting

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. – More than 7,000 petition signatures from people opposed to expanded oil and gas drilling in Kern County were delivered today to the Kern County Planning Commission. A proposed county ordinance would allow the permitting of more than 67,000 new oil and gas wells over the next 20 years with no additional environmental review. If approved, this ordinance would lead to a near doubling of the 78,000 wells already present in Kern County, representing one of the biggest decisions that will be made regarding California's energy and climate policy for decades to come.

Of all oil and gas production in California, 80 percent is in Kern County. Expanding toxic oil and gas extraction in the county would cause devastating public health impacts in an area that already has some of the nation's worst air. Numerous scientific studies show a direct link between oil and gas pollution and a wide range of serious adverse health impacts, including asthma, cancer, high-risk pregnancies and preterm births. This air pollution is also directly linked to higher risks of contracting and dying from COVID-19.

"We shouldn't have to choose between good jobs and our family's well-being. We need our leaders to stop focusing the county's resources on a declining industry that makes a few affluent people richer while making the rest of us sick. Instead, they need to shift the county's focus to creating good-paying, sustainable jobs that will keep our families safe and our economy strong." - **Bryan Osorio, Mayor, City of Delano.**

A February 2020 ruling by the Fifth District Court of Appeal, which struck down an earlier effort from 2015, found that the County failed to adequately disclose or mitigate the significant harms this ordinance would cause to the county's water, air and public health. Despite these failures, the County's new draft environmental impact report has few meaningful changes. Moreover, the new version would still allow the County and oil and gas operators to skip environmental review for individual oil and gas wells.

"This proposed ordinance would silence the voices of the very people most affected. New wells would be allowed with no public notice, no public comments, and no site-specific review or efforts to offset impacts, whether the site is in the middle of a farm field, next to an elementary school or near a health

clinic. Our community must stand up to stop this expanded drilling." - **Juan Flores, Community Organizer in Kern County for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment**.

"As COVID continues to run rampant through our communities and with no existing law protecting our schools and homes from the impacts of oil and gas operations, doubling the pollution output of the oil industry is the last thing our families need. Our elected officials need to stop putting industry wealth before the health of our families. As technology evolves, so must we." - **Jesus Alonso, Kern Community Organizer for Clean Water Action**

Of the Californians who live within a mile of oil and gas wells and within areas most burdened by environmental pollution in general, nearly 92% are people of color.

"Existing oil and gas wells in Kern County disproportionately harm communities of color and areas that are already burdened by toxic air. The last thing we need is 67,000 more wells, particularly as we face multiple public health crises -- the COVID-19 pandemic and adverse health impacts resulting from residents' close proximity to wells. We need our County Supervisors to do the right thing and reject this ordinance to protect public health and help our communities and climate thrive." - **Mercedes Macias, Senior Organizer in Kern County for the Sierra Club.**

"Oil and gas drilling is a significant contributor to climate change. Oil and gas drilling leaks methane, known to be a climate change accelerator. As California faces historic wildfires and prolonged drought, this expansion of fossil fuels extraction would send exactly the wrong signal about how the state should approach climate change and the effort to enact social and environmental justice. For the young people in Kern County who want a climate-safe future, and for all future generations, we call upon the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors and Governor Newsom to abandon this proposed increase in local oil and gas extraction." - **Elizabeth Perez, Community Organizer in Kern County for the Central California Environmental Justice Network.**

Expanding oil and gas extraction would also harm the county's agriculture industry. Wells on farmland already pose a toxic threat to groundwater and soil, and many of the new wells would be drilled on prime farmland. Agriculture accounts for 63,700 local jobs and 18% of Kern County's economy.

For more information please visit https://crpe-ej.org/stopkernoilordinance.

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