



Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

February 14, 2020

Dear Governor Newsom,

We, the undersigned elected officials, are writing on behalf of more than 300 local elected officials from 49 counties across California. Our June 3, 2019 letter urges you to outline a plan to phase out oil and gas drilling statewide, starting by: (1) ending new permits for oil and gas drilling, (2) enacting 2,500-foot science-based public health setbacks on oil and gas production; and (3) achieving 100% clean energy in all sectors and investing first in impacted communities.

We respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss how this existential issue impacts the communities we represent and how we can work together to protect all Californians.

Thank you for your announcement on November 19, 2019 that your Administration will begin to address fossil fuel production's terrible costs to California by enacting a moratorium on new fracking permits while a new rulemaking process is developed and a partial moratorium on cyclic steam-injection drilling. These are important first steps towards phasing out fossil fuel production.

However, **much greater action is urgently needed to protect Californians from the severe public health and safety harms of oil and gas extraction on our communities, and to begin a swift phase out of oil and gas production to address the climate emergency.** The science is clear: to protect our health and communities, we must immediately start to phase out all fossil fuel production and burning.

It is unconscionable that the State of California has no minimum public health setbacks on toxic oil and gas drilling, and continues to approve permits for new oil and gas wells despite the overwhelming scientific evidence of devastating public health and climate harms of fossil fuels on our people, economies, and planet.^{2,3,4} Across the state, our constituents have demanded urgent action to address these harms.

In the absence of comprehensive state policy to address fossil fuel production, California local governments are taking action. **More than 110 local governments in California have passed more than 160 policies to protect our communities and our climate from fossil fuels**, including setbacks on oil and gas drilling, opposing fossil fuel infrastructure or production, bans on new fossil fuel end-user infrastructure, and lawsuits against and divestment from the fossil fuel industry.⁵

In addition to the terrible health and climate costs, the financial costs to California taxpayers of addressing the toxic aftermath of oil and gas production is immense. According to the California Council on Science and Technology, remediating the 5,540 oil and gas wells in California that are most likely to be abandoned, with no known responsible or financially viable operator to plug and decommission wells' production facilities is a taxpayer liability of \$500 million. Furthermore, the report finds that "an additional 69,425 economically marginal and idle wells could become orphaned in the future," with total potential decommissioning and remediation costs to California's taxpayers of more than \$5 billion. The total cost, including wells that are currently active producers, could rise to more than \$9 billion.⁶

The toxic burden from carelessly abandoned oil and gas wells by financially insolvent or negligent operators should not become a burden to taxpayers. Californians should not be forced to bear the costs of fossil fuel production. It is clear that the industry does not have a plan to address these issues for either prior or future wells.

No new permits for oil and gas drilling should be issued while there is no financial mechanism to properly plug and decommission every well in California without the remediation, public health, and environmental costs being borne by taxpayers. These costs should be shouldered by the oil and gas industry, not the public.

You have an historic opportunity to act. Amid worldwide cataclysmic wildfires from California to the Amazon, Australia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Indonesia, Siberia, and British Columbia, massive oil spills, increased public alarm, and heightened media attention, now is the time for bold action. Major cities like Los Angeles and New York City are announcing plans to phase out fossil fuels. Many leading presidential candidates have pledged to ban fracking and stop major fossil fuel infrastructure projects. What will be your action in this moment of climate emergency?

We urge you to decisively lead the nation and world in the transition away from fossil fuels.

We stand ready to support you in the strongest, swiftest possible measures to phase out the production of fossil fuels that justly transitions California to 100% clean energy, lifts up workers and communities harmed by fossil fuel production, and sets a strong vision and course to support any displaced fossil fuel workers and affected communities during the transition.

We respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss these matters and how we can work together to create a safe, healthy, and prosperous California now and for all future Californians.

Sincerely,

Mayor Meghan Sahli-Wells, City of Culver City, Los Angeles County
Mayor Heidi Harmon, City of San Luis Obispo, San Luis Obispo County
Mayor Serge Dedina, City of Imperial Beach, San Diego County
Mayor John D'Amico, City of West Hollywood, Los Angeles County
Mayor Pro Tem Carmen Ramirez, City of Oxnard, Ventura County
Councilmember Paul Koretz, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County
Councilmember Bryan Osorio, City of Delano, Kern County
Councilmember Felipe Perez, City of Firebaugh, Fresno County
Councilmember Sofia Pereira, City of Arcata, Humboldt County
Councilmember Eduardo Martinez, City of Richmond, Contra Costa County
Councilmember Gleam Davis, City of Santa Monica, Los Angeles County

SOURCES:

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5. Elected Officials to Protect California. "Local Government Action on Fossil Fuels: Compendium of California Local Government Policies and Actions to Protect Our Public Health, Environment, and Climate from Fossil Fuel Production." (February 2020) <http://californiaelectedofficials.org/local-action>
6. California Council on Science and Technology (CCST) "Orphan Wells in California: An Initial Assessment of the State's Potential Liabilities to Plug and Decommission Orphan Oil and Gas Wells." (November 2018) <https://ccst.us/wp-content/uploads/CCST-Orphan-Wells-in-California-An-Initial-Assessment.pdf>

APPENDICES

- Local Government Action on Fossil Fuels: Compendium of California Local Government Policies and Actions to Protect Our Public Health, Environment, and Climate from Fossil Fuel Production.
- Elected Officials to Protect California June 3, 2019 letter, signed by more than 300 elected officials from 49 counties in California. Letter and signatories available online at californiaelectedofficials.org



Protecting Our Public Health, Climate, and Prosperity

A Letter from California Elected Officials

June 3, 2019

Dear Governor Newsom,

We, the undersigned elected officials, are deeply concerned about the immediate and long-term harms to the people we represent from climate change and pollution caused by the extraction, processing, and burning of fossil fuels.

California has made great progress by committing our electricity sector to be carbon-neutral by 2045 and supporting the Paris Agreement. We appreciate that you have made addressing climate change a priority of your administration. **You have rightly said “we must map out longer-term strategies...for California’s energy future, to ensure that the cost of climate change doesn’t fall on those least able to afford it.”**

The science is clear that phasing out fossil fuel production is urgently needed to address climate change and protect public health. It is imperative that California issue no new permits and establish public health setbacks for existing oil and gas drilling. Production of oil and gas is a significant contributor to California’s greenhouse gas emissions.^{1,2} Yet California remains a top oil-producing state, and three-quarters of oil produced here is as climate-damaging as Canada’s tar sands crude oil.³ The disastrous consequences of fossil fuel production and burning from air pollution alone -- not including escalating harms from droughts, fires, mudslides, storms, and sea level rise -- already cost Californians more than 12,000 lives and \$100 billion dollars annually.⁴

Unfortunately, the worst costs of fossil fuels are falling on Californians least able to afford them, exacerbating environmental injustices. Nearly 8,500 active California oil and gas wells are located within 2,500 feet of homes, schools, and hospitals,⁵ where, according to the California Council on Science and Technology, exposure to toxic air contaminants and other pollution caused by oil and gas wells is a significant threat to public health.⁶ These harms disproportionately impact people of color and economically disadvantaged communities.⁷ Between 2011 and 2018, of the more than 21,000 new oil and gas wells permitted by the state,

76 percent are located in communities with above-average poverty rates for California, and 67 percent are located in communities of color.⁸

These harms are a bad deal for Californians. **The oil and gas industry contributes less than 0.9 percent of California’s GDP and 0.2 percent of jobs,^{9,10} whereas transitioning away from fossil fuels to renewable energy and expanding electrification is a net job creator.**^{11,12}

As governor of California, you have a historic opportunity to lead our nation and the world on a pivotal path away from fossil fuels. Recognizing that we are in a climate emergency, as you have acknowledged, and given the grave public health and environmental justice consequences of fossil fuel production in California, we respectfully urge you to make a new statewide commitment and lay out a plan to achieve the following:

- **End the issuance of permits for new fossil fuel projects**, including permits for new oil and gas wells, infrastructure for fossil fuels, and petrochemical projects in California.
- **Design a swift, managed decline of all fossil fuel production, starting with a 2,500-foot human health and safety buffer zone** around all homes, hospitals, schools, playgrounds, and farms to protect public health and address the severe environmental injustice of production in low-income communities and communities of color.
- **Commit the state to 100% clean, renewable energy in all sectors**, starting with significant investments in disadvantaged communities and areas that are already suffering the most from the worst impacts of fossil fuel extraction and climate change.

Phasing out fossil fuel production is paramount to addressing climate change, and will make California healthier and safer. It will also create hundreds of thousands of jobs throughout the state as we increase investment in renewable energy, clean vehicles and buildings, energy efficiency, public transportation, and other innovative solutions.^{4,12} We must include a just transition for fossil fuel workers to help build the clean energy economy of tomorrow, reducing pollution and expanding opportunity for all.

We look to you to provide the leadership we need for a safe, healthy, and prosperous California.

Sincerely,

308 elected officials from 49 counties in California

Full list of signatories available online at californiaelectofficials.org

References

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