

April 20, 2022

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
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Dear Governor Newsom,

As California and U.S. scientists, we commend you and your administration on taking key steps toward protecting California's communities and climate from fossil fuel pollution: proposing a health and safety setback between communities and new oil and gas wells,¹ a ban on new fracking projects by 2024,² and joining the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance as an associate member.

But in this time of emergency, stronger action is needed now to stem the escalating climate, health and justice crises created by fossil fuel pollution. The oil industry drills in our neighborhoods, pollutes our air, soil, and water, and harms public health. It fuels the growing climate crisis that is taking lives, destroying homes, and jeopardizing our future—with harms falling on Latinx, Black, Indigenous, and low-income communities first and worst.

We implore you and your administration to use executive authority to lead the state in a rapid and just transition away from fossil fuels, oversee a clean renewable energy build-out, and put public health, safety, and a livable future first. Specifically, we urge you to:

- **End neighborhood oil drilling** by promptly finalizing a strong, comprehensive health-and-safety setbacks rule that prohibits all oil and gas operations within a minimum 3,200 feet of homes, schools, hospitals, and other sensitive sites, as advised by CalGEM's own public health experts. This rule would:
 - End new oil and gas extraction permits within the setback while the rule is pending;
 - Prohibit all new permits within the setback that enable continued production including redrilling, sidetracking, reworking, and returning idle or abandoned wells to active production or injection;
 - Rapidly phase out existing wells and infrastructure within the setback; and
 - Enact pollution controls on all oil and gas operations outside the buffer.
- **Stop permitting new fossil fuel projects**, including new oil and gas extraction, fossil fuel infrastructure, and petrochemical projects in all of California.
- **Phase out existing oil and gas production** in line with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C climate limit, with an equitable transition that protects workers, communities and economies.

- **Reject fossil fuel industry delay tactics** including carbon capture and storage, “blue” hydrogen made from fossil fuels, and carbon offsets, that allow the fossil-fuel era to continue and impede the rapid transition to clean renewable energy.
- **Advance to full Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance membership** and advocate with the Biden administration and other states for greater action and membership.

California’s oil industry has created a public health and environmental justice crisis in our state. From Los Angeles to Kern County to the Bay Area, more than 7 million Californians, totaling 18 percent of the population, live within a mile of at least one oil or gas well.³ A long history of environmental racism has concentrated oil and gas wells, refineries, and other fossil fuel infrastructure—with all their adjacent harms—in Black, Brown and Indigenous communities.⁴ In California, the majority of residents living closest to oil and gas extraction sites are people of color.⁵

A large and growing body of public health data has established that exposure to toxic emissions and chemicals⁶ from oil and gas drilling leads to serious health harms.⁷ Research in California⁸ and other states shows that living near oil and gas wells increases the risks of cancer,⁹ asthma,¹⁰ birth defects,¹¹ preterm births and high-risk pregnancies,¹² low-birthweight babies,¹³ higher hospitalization rates,¹⁴ and upper respiratory problems and rashes.¹⁵

California cannot be a health and environmental justice leader while giving permits to the oil industry to dig, burn, and dump toxic pollution in communities of color and low-income communities.

Fossil fuel pollution is also driving a “code red” climate emergency in California and globally, where the chances for avoiding irreversible and uncontrollable climate chaos diminish daily. Fossil-fueled climate disasters are escalating across California. The damage from increasingly extreme heat waves, droughts and floods, as well as destruction from wildfires¹⁶ once again falls disproportionately on Brown, Black, Indigenous and low-income frontline communities.¹⁷ These climate disasters are certain to get worse – much worse – without emergency action to rapidly phase out fossil fuel extraction.

A robust body of scientific research has established that new fossil fuel production and infrastructure must be halted and much existing production must be phased out to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius and avoid the worst climate catastrophe.¹⁸ Leaders around the world have acknowledged the urgency to end new fossil fuel project approvals.¹⁹

Yet California is still one of the country’s top oil producers. Further, due to the use of extreme, energy-intensive extraction techniques, oil produced in California is among the most climate-damaging in the world.²⁰ California cannot confront the climate crisis while continuing to

expand fossil fuel development and infrastructure. It must also reject ineffective and dangerous false solutions like carbon capture and storage (CCS), hydrogen produced from fossil fuels, and carbon offsets that enable the fossil fuel industry to prolong its polluting operations.²¹

We implore you and your administration, on behalf of California's communities and all life on Earth, to lead the necessary rapid transition away from fossil fuels, beginning with an immediate end to all neighborhood drilling and new fossil fuel project approvals, and oversee a rapid buildout of clean, renewable energy that truly protects people and the planet.

Sincerely,

Scientists joining this letter do so in their individual capacities and not on behalf of the institutions with which they are affiliated.

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