

March 14 2023

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

CC: Lauren Sanchez, Wade Crowfoot, Sam Assefa, Gabe Tiffany, David Shabazian

Re: Urgent action needed after increased permitting within 3200 foot health buffer

We are writing as members of the Last Chance Alliance, a coalition of more than 900 public health, environmental justice, climate and labor groups from across California working to address the climate crisis by building a safer, cleaner and healthier world beyond fossil fuels.

We are alarmed by the rapid increase in oil and gas rework permit approvals in the past weeks, many of which are for wells within the 3,200' health protection zone.

A total of 598 rework permits have been approved since the start of the year and of those, 370 rework permits (62%) were issued within 3,200 feet of communities, inside the health protection zones that would have been created by Senate Bill 1137. Approvals for oil and gas permits are skyrocketing. More rework permits were issued in the first two weeks of March than all of February. Of those, 338 permits were issued within the health protection zone.

These permits are an affront to frontline communities that fought for over a decade for these essential and bare-minimum community protections, and on which your administration has shown leadership and helped to pass legislation. Moreover, it appears that CalGEM approved these permits without any environmental review of the serious harms that are likely to result from these dangerous operations.

We urge you to **rescind** these permits in the health buffer and direct your state regulators to ensure these are the **very last permits ever issued** within the health protection zone, to end all permitting for new fossil fuel projects, and proceed with the ongoing public health rulemaking to permanently establish a 3200' health protection zone. We are asking you to be the leader Californians deserve and the global community aspires to by taking clear concrete steps to address the root causes of our climate crisis and related public health emergencies.

The rapid increase in rework permits follows a permitting spike in the final months of last year in which CalGEM issued over 200 permits for new oil wells, 100 of which were within 3,200 feet of a sensitive site. These permit approvals came weeks before such permits were to be prohibited under SB1137. These new drilling permits will result in harmful climate pollution and perpetuate a well-documented public health crisis by allowing the oil industry to continue to operate near communities for years to come.

This is exactly the sort of permitting free-for-all we feared when the oil industry spent millions to deceive Californian voters on a referendum to overturn SB 1137. With this landmark environmental justice law on hold, industry is capitalizing on this moment to continue dangerous and toxic operations in neighborhoods. They cannot be allowed to profit off of their ability to manipulate democracy and be rewarded with more drilling permits simply because they have enough money to play the system.

This winter California has faced an unprecedented and climate change fueled series of storms that deluged the state with flooding, resulting in at least 20 deaths and an estimated \$1 billion in damages. This comes on the heels of years of record breaking wildfire seasons and deadly heat waves. This is a code red climate emergency for our state, driven by the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. These climate fueled disasters will only get worse if we do not take urgent steps now.

Research shows that any new fossil fuel extraction is incompatible with keeping global temperature rise within 1.5 degrees Celsius. Moreover, oil produced in California is among the dirtiest, most climate-damaging on the planet. Ending permits for new fossil fuel exploration is a clear action you have the authority to take and that is needed to begin the phase-out of oil and gas production and show that we cannot keep drilling if we want California to have a livable future.

California, where historical discriminatory housing policies have trapped communities of color, particularly Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, and low-wealth communities in over polluted neighborhoods, and where more than 7 million people live within a mile of an operational oil and gas well, must lead the way with solutions to the climate crisis that are centered in and driven by health and equity.

More than a year ago, CalGEM's Public Health Rulemaking Scientific Advisory Panel concluded that the most health protective strategy from oil and gas production is to stop drilling and developing new wells, phase out existing oil and gas development activities and associated infrastructure, and properly plug and remediate legacy wells and ancillary infrastructure.

It is our hope that CalGEM has been acting as a rogue agency, out of step with your administration's strong climate goals and rhetoric. And with the appointment of a new strong progressive leader, you can ensure the state oil and gas agency is finally aligned with California's climate leadership. For years, the agency has failed to fulfill its mandate to protect public health and the climate. The agency has failed to provide key data on oil and gas hazards to Californians, issue plugging orders for thousands of idle wells, inspect existing wells for leaks, secure appropriate bonds for well cleanup, and respond to public comments in a timely manner. Now is the time for you to direct a much-needed course correction.

It's 2023. The climate crisis is not a far-off problem that we can offload to the next leader, or the next generation to solve. As your administration has acknowledged repeatedly, the time for

urgent and bold action is **now**. We are applauding as we watch you calling out the extreme profits of oil companies and taking actions to rein in polluter greed. Oil companies are indeed ripping us off, but they are also making millions of people sick, circumventing our democracy, and jeopardizing our future. We sincerely hope that you can urgently declare a turning point for frontline communities and the climate, and that the recently issued permits within the health protection zone are the very last of their kind.

We look forward to celebrating that day with you.

Signed, members of the Last Chance Alliance, including:

VISION (Voices In Solidarity against Oil in Neighborhoods)

Communities for a Better Environment

Central California environmental justice Network

Fossil Free California

The Climate Center

Oil and Gas Action Network

Climate First: Replacing Oil & Gas

Center for Biological Diversity

Climate Hawks Vote

Friends of the Earth

Sunflower Alliance

Local Clean Energy Alliance

350 Bay Area Action

Sacramento Indivisible

Oil Change International

Food and Water Watch

CA Nurses for Environmental Health and Justice

Sierra Club CA

Greenpeace USA

Inland Mendocino Democratic Club

Action for the Climate Emergency

SF Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility

FracTracker Alliance

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

Indivisible CA Green Team

350 Silicon Valley

350 Marin

350 Contra Costa Action

Stand.earth

Consumer Watchdog

Presente.org

Elected Officials to Protect America

Let's Green CA!

Elders Climate Action, NorCal