



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 21, 2021

CONTACT:

Kobi Naseck | VISION | kobi@vision-ca.org | 214-609-2439

Riddhi S. Patel | Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment | rpatel@crpe-ej.org | 661-865-4881

VISION coalition commends historic 3,200 ft setback for public health, urges Governor Newsom to close loopholes and phase out neighborhood drilling

Wilmington, CA (October 21st, 2021) - Today, the California Geologic Energy Management Agency (CalGEM) issued a momentous draft rule banning the permitting of oil and gas wells within 3,200 ft of homes, schools, hospitals and detention centers. The draft rule promises to set into motion a [directive](#) made by Governor Newsom almost two years ago to take action on the issue of neighborhood oil and gas extraction. While environmental justice advocates await details of the full draft rule, the coalition celebrated the historic buffer zone distance while urging the Newsom administration to strengthen the rule.

“Wilmington residents have lived with the dangerous health impacts of oil drilling for far too long. The Governor’s announcement regarding the CALGEM rulemaking shows us that the Newsom administration is listening to us,” **said Wendy Miranda, Wilmington Community Member, Communities for a Better Environment.** “But now we need them to strengthen this rule and make it law. Countless frontline environmental justice communities have been waiting for this rule and we look forward to engaging in the process to ensure that workers and communities are protected as this rule is finalized.”

The draft rule on oil and gas extraction takes place just one month after working class communities of color defeated a right-wing recall campaign and just weeks after Newsom appeared at an oil-clogged beach in Orange County proclaiming California’s commitment to securing a livable future and just transition.

“Today’s announcement represents years of work by environmental justice advocates to put public health first after over a century of putting oil company profits over health and safety. Governor Newsom and his administration are now listening to the front line communities who have borne the burden of proving they have been harmed by need to take a science-based approach and listen to frontline residents -- mostly low income Black and Latino families -- whose health has suffered the assault of living next to oil wells for years,” **says Martha Dina Arguello, Executive Director of Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles.** “We know there is no safe distance for oil and gas drilling, but until we phase out all drilling our communities will continue to be at risk from day-to-day operations and the continuous threat of catastrophic accidents like we saw in Orange County. We look forward to reviewing the

regulations and working towards a healthy and equitable transition.”

Proximity to oil production sites increases exposure to toxic chemicals and byproducts of California’s industrial oil operations, which take place just feet away from homes, schools, parks, hospitals, prisons, and daycare centers.

“Science has confirmed the need for a 3,200 ft setback for communities living close to oil and gas. Residents of environmental justice communities in Kern County, like those living in Lamont, Arvin, Lost Hills who have for decades been suffocated with dangerous gases from the oil facilities surrounding their homes, are finally receiving good news,” **says Nayamin Martinez, Executive Director of CCEJN.** “Today’s decision is promising - but we need to demonstrate the first step towards health is as important as the profits of the oil companies that are cozy with Kern County politicians.”

“Oil and gas companies have been treating our communities as sacrifice zones for over a century. This industry has elevated its own profits above the health, well-being, and lives of primarily BIPOC and low-income communities.” **said Juan Flores, community organizer with the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment.** “Frontline community members have spoken in a clear voice, demanding an end to neighborhood drilling. Today, Governor Newsom and CalGEM have announced a health and safety setback of 3200 feet, a strong step in the right direction. However, this draft rule misses the chance to prohibit new permits for existing wells, a key element for our communities. We look forward to working with the administration to close this loophole and quickly move to protect our communities at long last.”

“For decades the San Joaquin Valley has seen epidemic levels of sickness from being one of the nation’s most polluted air basins for fine particle (PM2.5) and ozone pollution. Oil and gas operations emit toxic air pollutants including PM2.5, a major contributor to serious cases of COVID-19, and are a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions,” **said Catherine Garoupa-White with the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition.** “Today’s draft rule is a crucial first step in a continuing battle to protect everyone, especially frontline communities, from the worst of oil and gas byproducts. Health and safety buffers will combat climate change and improve air quality, protecting the right to breathe clean air. We call on the Newsom administration to strengthen the rule and demand rework permits be included in the final rule.”

For years, frontline environmental justice communities have called on CalGEM to consider the health impacts of neighborhood drilling, including: cancer, preterm birth and low birth weights, asthma and other respiratory diseases, hospitalization for heart failure, fatigue, stress, and severe cases of COVID-19. Neighborhood drilling threatens life expectancy overwhelmingly impacts low-income communities and communities of color, a clear form of environmental racism.

“After years of delay, we are encouraged by this announcement from the Newsom administration, which sends a strong signal that oil and gas has no place in neighborhoods. We’re ready to carry this rule home and make sure it actually accomplishes what we need it to accomplish: the end of neighborhood oil and gas drilling. If the final rule doesn’t do that, then it’s not enough. Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian immigrant communities deserve neighborhoods free from air, water and soil pollution. We know today’s announcement of 3,200 ft setbacks for frontline communities is just a first, critical step. Oil and gas executives won’t let neighborhood oil drilling end without a fight — and we’ll keep fighting for working people until every person’s right to clean air in every neighborhood is guaranteed.” **said Neena Mohan, Climate Justice Manager with the California Environmental Justice Alliance.**

####