

Proximity-Based Hazards

The close proximity of many LA County Public Schools to Oil & Gas wells poses many health and safety hazards to students. These oil and gas wells have been a known health problem for a long time, but continually pose risks to entire communities because of a lack of strong regulation.

The Los Angeles Basin is the largest urban oil field in the country, and as such presents a unique problem. There are 68 active oil fields in the county, each with many wells. As indicated by the figures and maps in this report, there are tons of these wells - 21,259 in total. Of these wells, 1,664 of them are within 1,000 feet of public schools. When increasing this buffer distance to one mile, we shockingly find that 16,067 wells lie within one mile of public schools.

While an abundance of these wells exist in Los Angeles county, many of these wells should not be a cause of too much concern. While 16,067 wells lie within a mile of public schools, 13,253 of these are idle, abated, or plugged. This does not mean that these wells are not a health risk. Idle and abated wells can be restarted at any time. However, they are not as immediate a threat to public health as new and active wells.

The “new and active wells” category consists of wells which are currently active or being drilled. There are 80 of these wells within 1,000 feet or less of public schools, and 2,814 within a mile. These wells pose an active risk to the community - according to an LA Department of Public Health report, these wells actively decrease air quality, cause loud noises at all times, and emit strong odors. According to Stand-LA, studies have shown that oil development contributes to both short and long-term health defects, including headaches, nosebleeds, respiratory illness, and increased risk of cancer.

The existing regulations of these wells are somewhat lax. Currently, Los Angeles zoning code requires a setback distance of 300 feet away from Oil & Gas wells. At this distance, regardless of other circumstances, many health and safety impacts are unavoidable. The Los Angeles Health Department recommends that this buffer be expanded to at least 1,500 feet. However, even at this distance, hazards such as fires and explosions can still cause a large problem. Additionally, due to gaps in long-term exposure data, we do not know the risk of disease and cancer that this distance poses. (LA Department of Public Health)

Finally, there are several active wells scattered around Los Angeles which use Fracking. Fracking is a much more polluting process than traditional oil drilling. Fracking sites across the country are suspected of contaminating populations' drinking water. Additionally, fracking sites release incredible amounts of toxic air pollutants, which have been linked to many serious illnesses. These include asthma, childhood leukemia, and birth defects - all of which are incredibly relevant to school-aged children (NDRC). Within LA County, 15 schools lie within 1 mile of active fracking zones. Figure 11 depicts this list. These schools are some of the most communities at risk due to these oil and gas wells.