# **Calif. county's oil well permitting to remain paused after court ruling**

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**Body**

By Wes Venteicher SACRAMENTO, California - Permitting of new ***oil*** wells will remain paused in ***Kern*** County after a state appellate court ruled Thursday that the county still hasn't met California Environmental Quality Act requirements. The ruling is a victory for environmental and community groups including the Natural Resources Defense Council, Earthjustice, the Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity in their fight against a county plan to streamline well permitting. It's a loss for the county and the California Independent Petroleum Association. Drilling of new wells has been paused for more than a year under court orders in California's most ***oil***-rich county as the state imports more crude from overseas and contends with gas price spikes amid its transition to carbon-free energy.

The county put out the first version of the drilling plan in 2015 and reworked it after an earlier loss in court. Thursday's ruling by the Fifth District Court of Appeal found the county's latest attempt was still insufficient. The county failed to sufficiently evaluate cancer risks near wells and it didn't go far enough in preserving water supplies, the ruling said. The vast majority of ***oil*** extraction in California occurs in the San Joaquin Valley in ***Kern*** County. The Department of Conservation's Geologic Energy Management Division issued 551 new well permits in the state in 2022, but just 24 last year after the pause on new permits, according to CalGEM data. The drilling pause has inflamed fights over how much ***oil*** extraction California, which has set some of the nation's most ambitious climate goals, should be allowing and how in-state extraction affects gas prices. The California Energy Commission has published data showing the state is importing a much greater share of its crude ***oil*** than in the past. The industry has run ads blaming high gas prices on California's regulations, and major ***oil*** companies have dimmed their estimates for future business in the state while continuing to expand globally. Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) has made a political punching bag of Big ***Oil*** and has accused ***oil*** companies of "gouging" consumers when California gas prices reached averages as high as $6.42 per gallon, and he pushed legislation ordering the CEC to analyze gas markets and potentially to impose a cap on ***oil*** company profits. The county is reviewing the ruling and considering its next steps, spokesperson Ally Soper said in an emailed statement. "As always, our ***Kern*** County Board of Supervisors continues to support our ***oil*** industry and environmentally protective ***oil*** and gas permitting as part of the energy future of not only ***Kern*** County, but California at large," Soper said. Environmental groups cheered, while California Independent Petroleum Association President Rock Zierman said the court's ruling went too far. "The issues identified by the appeals court to be resolved are very narrow and would pertain to very few permit applications," Zierman said in a statement. "We are disappointed the court did not allow the county to proceed with wells that met all the criteria no longer in dispute. As a result, California is going to continue to increase its dependence on imported foreign crude rather than energy produced by ***Kern*** citizens." "We are grateful that the court saw the county's actions for what they were - dangerous and illegal," Anabel Marquez, president of Committee for a Better Shafter," said in a statement. "The codependence between ***Kern*** and the ***oil*** and gas industry may persist in other ways, but we will continue to be thorns in their sides, fighting for the clean air, water and land that we deserve." The court's ruling sends the plan back to the county for more work.

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