# **Court rulings' impact on Kern oil permitting remains fuzzy**

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**Body**

Jun. 12—Court rulings released Tuesday may have set back ***Kern***'s efforts to resume over-the-counter ***oil*** permitting, but it remains to be seen just how far back and what actions could be necessary to bring the county's system into compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

Lawyers in the case agreed a number of remedies are possible, at the judge's discretion and depending on what the parties involved ultimately work out among themselves. The resolution could go on for more than a year, they said, or it could take only a few months.

A case management conference scheduled for July 14 is expected to provide guidance on what the county will have to do to address three main deficiencies identified in a 41-page set of rulings released last week by ***Kern*** County Superior Court Judge Gregory Pulskamp.

None of the parties involved would venture a guess as to what lies ahead in the case, other than that the county will have to make changes if it wants to continue permitting as it had as recently as October.

That's when Pulskamp put a halt to county permitting with a court order that reverberated across California ***oil*** production, holding back drilling activity and local oilfield employment at a time of elevated barrel prices. The county had made changes to its environmental review seven months prior in an effort to fix problems an appellate court found in February 2020, but Pulskamp ruled those revisions hadn't gone far enough.

County Counsel Margo Raison declined to discuss the possibilities ahead, saying by email only that the county is reviewing and analyzing Pulskamp's rulings, discussing its ramifications and considering options.

***Kern*** County Planning and Natural Resources Department Director Lorelei Oviatt added by email that Tuesday's rulings do not stand as the final word, nor do they lay out specific steps that will be required of the county.

"So, there is no final judgment and no remedy to comment on yet," she wrote.

Two of California's leading ***oil*** trade groups did not respond to requests for comment.

The county and its industry sponsors in the effort have long predicted a drawn-out legal process will be required to bring the system into full compliance, if only because environmental groups and others adamantly oppose the idea of a regionwide assessment substituting for individual project reviews.

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