# **Kern oil permitting review hits delay**

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**Body**

Oct. 10-- Oct. 10--An environmental document central to ***Kern***'s push to reinstitute streamlined local ***oil*** permitting will be revised and put back out for public comment no later than early November, the county announced Friday.

The change pushes back the approval process by at least 45 days. It means the county Planning Commission will not host a hearing on the matter in November, as had been the plan, and the Board of Supervisors won't be able to vote on it before the end of the year.

"We appreciate all the thoughtful comments we received (during the initial public comment period) and the recirculated document to be released by the first week in November continues our commitment to environmental protection and fact-based information for the decision makers and public to make an informed decision," Lorelei Oviatt, director of ***Kern***'s Planning and Natural Resources Department, said by email.

The document, known as a draft supplemental recirculated environmental impact report, had been put out for public review during the summer. Its 45-day comment period expired in mid-September and county staff said they were working on addressing public comments.

An earlier version of the report was approved by the board in late 2015 as part of a new zoning ordinance making local ***oil*** permitting a strictly ministerial process. But environmentalists and a local farming entity sued and ultimately persuaded an appeals court to strike down the document in February.

The ordinance had required a variety of measures to cushion the industry's environmental and health impacts in exchange for new permitting certainty for local ***oil*** producers.

Environmentalists had called for more time to review the document, which measured about 1,600 pages. They continue to assail the county's industry-funded efforts, saying ***Kern*** should quit trying for a blanket review of local ***oil*** and gas activity and instead examine the local impacts of each individual permit application.

Chelsea Tu, senior attorney at the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, which has offices in Oakland and ***Kern***, said by email Friday the county's review and public process has long been problematic.

"No matter how many times the county revises this environmental impact report, the bottom line is that passing this ordinance would green-light tens of thousands of ***oil*** and gas wells and bring even more air and water pollution in ***Kern*** communities," Tu wrote.

"We hope that the county will take this opportunity to seriously consider withdrawing this harmful ordinance," she continued, "and to focus (on) building a clean energy future that protects the health of ***Kern*** families."

Another opponent of the county's initiative is Shafter-area grower Keith Gardiner, who successfully sued over what he said were unfair permitting rules favoring ***oil*** companies over farmers. He said in an email statement Friday ***Kern***'s Board of Supervisors should do more to protect agriculture.

"My hope is that this extension will result in the county proposing specific, effective mitigation measures for agriculture," he wrote. "These measures could be solutions such as setting up agriculture conservation easements and land banks, clustering new ***oil*** infrastructure and removing old production equipment that is still polluting the land and groundwater."

Follow John Cox on Twitter: @TheThirdGraf

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