# **United States : Kern Community Leaders, Residents, and Allied Organizations Respond to Board Of Supervisors Vote to Greenlight Tens of Thousands of New Toxic Oil Wells**

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**Body**

March 8, 2021, the ***Kern*** Board of Supervisors voted to put the ***oil*** industry before the health and well-being of ***Kern*** communities by passing an ordinance that would add tens of thousands of new toxic wells over the next two decades, posing a grave threat to public health and causing irreversible environmental damage.

Expanding ***oil*** and gas drilling would be detrimental to public health, especially for vulnerable populations that already face numerous injustices, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx, other communities of color and low-income communities, and particularly the children within these communities. For instance, one in four children in the southern Central Valley has asthma, one of the numerous chronic health conditions known to be linked to ***oil*** and gas production. In addition, studies published last year by Stanford University and the University of California link the correlation of low-birth weight and preterm birth impacts to proximity to ***oil*** wells.

***Kern*** County has some of the most polluted air in the country, which is directly linked to extraction and burning of fossil fuels from the existing 78,000 ***oil*** and gas wells. County leaders have turned a blind eye to environmental impacts of ***oil*** and gas drilling, including water supply and air quality problems, farmland degradation, and increased noise -- all of which contribute to climate change while harming marginalized communities. From 2015-2019, for example, one study found that the permits issued under the 2015 version of the ordinance were instituted in predominantly poor, linguistically isolated, Hispanic communities already suffering from existing environmental degradation, resulting in these communities becoming sacrifice zones.

On March 5th, more than 120 organizations, including environmental justice, labor, public health and community-based groups, delivered a letter opposing this harmful ordinance. 7,300 people signed a petition calling on the ***Kern*** County Board of Supervisors to reject this ordinance. In addition, at todays Board of Supervisors meeting, more than 250 people spoke in opposition to the ordinance.

Moving forward, ***Kern*** residents and allies will continue to rise up to call on state decision makers, namely state legislators and CalGEM, to right this wrong by passing and enacting policies to protect our communities and environments now and for the years to come:

CalGEM, the states ***oil*** and gas regulator, is in the process of developing its first Public Health and Safety Rule and is expected to publish its initial discussion draft in April 2021. Advocates have been calling on CalGEM to establish protective setbacks of at least 2,500 feet from homes, hospitals, and schools against ***oil*** and gas extraction.

SB 467 would prohibit all new or renewed permits for ***oil*** and gas extraction within 2,500 feet of any homes, schools, healthcare facilities, or long-term care institutions such as dormitories or prisons, by January 1, 2022.

SB 467 would also halt the issuance or renewal of permits for dangerous drilling practices, including hydraulic fracturing (fracking), acid well stimulation treatments, cyclic steaming, and water and steam flooding starting January 1, 2022, and then prohibit these extraction methods entirely starting January 1, 2027.

In response to todays Board of Supervisors vote, a coalition of ***Kern*** community leaders, residents, and social justice and environmental advocates offered the following statements:

The Board of Supervisors vote to pass this ordinance shows they are willing to turn a blind eye to the chronic health problems, disastrous environmental impacts, and disruptions to already disadvantaged communities of color that adding tens of thousands of new wells would create. Its inexcusable and shameful, but its not the end of the road for this movement and our communities to push back. Together, we will work to make sure the legislature understands the gravity of this issue, and pass common sense legislation to right this wrong and get to work building a future here in ***Kern*** County that is free from drilling, said Juan Flores, Community Organizer, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (CRPE).

Expanding ***oil*** and gas drilling not only is the wrong choice for the health of our neighbors and future of our communities - but it also demonstrates how our state is gravely failing to live up to its reputation as a progressive, innovative champion against climate change. Our ***Kern*** leaders should be focused on carving out bright and climate-safe futures for younger generations, not selling out to the ***oil*** industry. Make no mistake, well be calling on our legislators to pick up the Board of Supervisors slack, meet the urgency of the climate crisis we face and pass SB467, said Elizabeth Perez, Community Organizer in ***Kern*** County, Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN).

The Board of Supervisors has made it abundantly clear that their priorities do not include the future of ***Kern*** Countys economy nor the health of marginalized communities. We need our leaders to recognize this move will further delay ***Kern*** Countys opportunity for a just transition. We should be prioritizing our regions environment and communitys public health with a long-term focus on creating sustainable jobs. Unfortunately, with todays vote, our county leaders did not put ***Kern*** County first. They have disappointed our at-risk communities while ignoring their health concerns. Now, we look to our state legislators to pass SB467 and put our communities and our environment where they should be: first, said Bryan Osorio, Mayor, City of Delano.

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