

California is a Climate Emergency: Newsom Must Act

As climate change ramps up around the United States and globally, the risks to health and our environment are heightened. The threats of continued oil and gas production in California exacerbate these consequences, as wildfires, droughts, heat waves and sea-level rise become increasingly deadly. California faces a climate emergency worsened by entrenched fossil fuel production, while simultaneously being one of the leading states in energy-related carbon emissions.¹

Since January 2019, California has issued 2,383 new oil and gas-related permits.² The state is also home to 12 underground gas storage facilities and over 300 existing fossil-fueled power plants (with 7 new gas-fired power plants on the way), which are connected to a labyrinth of pipelines. California has also been promoting biogas — comprised primarily of the greenhouse gas methane — as a part of its transition to renewable energy. These operations threaten the climate, food, water and nearby communities, with disparate effects on poorer, communities of color.

Candidate Gavin Newsom campaigned on California's need to transition the state away from dirty energy, promising to oppose fracking and dangerous drilling and shut down the Aliso Canyon Gas Storage Facility. Now, as governor, he is empowered to lead California off fossil fuels and onto a renewable energy future.

The Dangers of Fossil Fuels

There are currently over 80,000 active oil and gas-related wells in the state, most of which are throughout the Central Valley.³ A majority of drilling occurs in low-income communities and communities of color and within close proximity to homes, places of employment and schools.⁴ This activity has been linked to headaches, asthma, disease and cancer.

Fracking has occurred in California for years and has been associated with public health problems, accidental spills of toxic waste, air pollution, earthquakes and



drinking water contamination.⁵ Steam injection is another method used to tap oil, but this dangerous process is inadequately regulated and uses toxic acids to access oil.⁶ Matrix acidizing and acid fracturing are not as commonly used, but the process is also unsafe.⁷

Drilling and fracking use large amounts of water that mix with naturally occurring contaminants, brines and radioactive material when injected underground.⁸ The produced water (wastewater) that comes to the surface is sometimes used to frack more wells and in agriculture, but it is most commonly discarded underground.⁹ Injecting wastewater into underground wells threatens drinking water and has been linked to earthquake activity.¹⁰ In California, companies have routinely injected oil wastewater directly into aquifers.¹¹

The many polluting power plants all over California are supported by over 100,000 miles of disruptive pipelines and 12 natural gas storage facilities.¹² Communities already vulnerable to environmental degradation are disparately burdened by these facilities. The massive Aliso Canyon methane leak that temporarily displaced 8,000 families¹³ is a grave reminder of the impacts they can have. Since 1999, pipelines in California have been responsible for 862 spills, leaks and other incidents that have injured or killed 147 people.¹⁴

California Can Lead the Country Off Fossil Fuels

The future of energy in California lies in clean, renewable power together with energy efficiency manufacturing

and installation, not dirty fossil fuels. We need to immediately stop the fossil fuel buildout, roll back production and usher in a green public works program that focuses on a fair and just transition for fossil fuel workers and that prioritizes communities most affected by industry.

Shifting to primarily wind and solar could allow California to avoid \$103 billion annually in air pollution-related health costs.¹⁵ Already, nearly six times more Californians work in the renewable energy generation and energy efficiency sectors than the fossil fuel sector.¹⁶

Recommendations

Candidate Gavin Newsom campaigned on California's need to transition the state away from dirty energy. Californians supported his vision of a clean energy future. Now, as governor, he has the power and authority to take six specific and tangible steps to make his vision a reality:

1. Stop issuing fossil fuel permits in California immediately, ban fracking and dangerous drilling, and develop a plan to phase out fossil fuel production; immediately implement measures to protect people and the environment until the phase-out is complete.
2. Protect California's water resources and agriculture from toxic wastewater.
3. Shut down California's dangerous fossil fuel infrastructure, including immediately and permanently closing the Aliso Canyon gas storage facility.
4. Amend California's Renewable Portfolio Standards goal to 100 percent clean, renewable energy and eliminate dirty energy.
5. Ban factory farming in California.
6. Develop a plan for a fair and just transition to 100 percent clean, renewable energy in California by 2030.

Endnotes

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- 13 "Investigators fault Southern California Gas in Aliso Canyon methane leak." *Associated Press*. May 17, 2019.
- 14 U.S. Department of Transportation. Pipelines and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. "Pipeline incident 20 year trend." Available at <https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/>. Accessed June 2019.
- 15 Jacobson, Mark Z. et al. "A roadmap for repowering California for all purposes with wind, water, and sunlight." *Energy*. Vol. 73. August 2014 at 883.
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