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Community Groups Urge Air District to Protect Bay Area Health and Safety from Proposed Toxic Tar Sands Oil Projects

San Francisco, CA – Bay Area residents, worker and community groups are calling on the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to support the community and worker-proposed recommendations to protect environmental health and safety from new toxic dirty oil projects.

The new slate of oil terminals, pipelines and refinery projects includes: the Chevron Richmond Refinery “Modernization,” the Praxair “Contra Costa Pipeline,” the WesPac “Energy Infrastructure” project in Pittsburg, the Valero Benicia Refinery’s “Crude by Rail,” and the Phillips 66Rodeo Refinery’s “Propane Recovery Project.” These projects could potentially lock in the oil infrastructure to enable oil companies to process lower quality oil feedstock, including tar sands, at the same time increasing the risk of hazards to workers and vulnerable communities that live near these projects.

"Oil companies brag about their strategies to their investors in publications, yet turn in local environmental impact reports that downplay the cumulative effect in the local communities", said Nancy Rieser, resident near the proposed Phillips 66 project in Rodeo. "If there is a propane accident in Rodeo, the Northwest section of town will be vaporized, a possibility that the Phillips 66 EIR deems as "insignificant. It is up to the Air District to regulate the oil feedstock now by adhering to stringent emission standards."

Higher sulfur and lower quality oil, like tar sands, has already caused serious harm to refinery communities, workers, and the environment. The United States Chemical Safety Board identified that higher sulfur oil corroded the pipe that failed catastrophically in the 2012 Richmond Chevron refinery fire that nearly killed 19 workers and sent 15,000 to hospitals. The same kind of sulfur corrosion found at the Richmond refinery was identified at the Chevron El Segundo refinery in Southern California as well. In 1999, denser oil contributed to a Martinez refinery fire that killed four people.

“All five of these proposed projects are pieces of this oil switch that could enable refining lower quality oil in the Bay Area,” said Andres Soto, Organizer at Communities for a Better Environment. “Big Oil is not being transparent with the type of dirty oil coming into the region and this could lead to more climate emissions, toxic pollution and catastrophic events like the Chevron explosion on August 6, 2012.”

Also, based on nationwide oil data, denser, higher sulfur oil has nearly doubled actual refinery CO2 emission intensity, based on peer-reviewed studies by Communities for a Better Environment (CBE).

“Local officials need to step up and make sure that these projects are not locking California into a toxic, dirty energy future and creating intolerable safety risks for vulnerable communities, said Diana Bailey, Senior Scientist at Natural Resource Defense Fund. “Allowing Bay Area sacrifice zones around oil terminals and refineries is not the price we should pay for oil independence. Instead, we should declare fossil fuel independence.”

This is a first for the nation: a response from a regional agency on how it will limit air pollution from refining “dirtier” grades of oil, like tar sands. The proposed major change in crude oil refined in the region also presents the potential for significantly increased safety and health hazards to the workers and surrounding communities. We recommend that the Air District hold oil companies to strong standards that focus on transparency, monitoring, reporting and documentation of refinery oil quality, the full range of potential emission impacts from any shift toward lower quality refinery oil feedstock, and the measures taken to ensure that such potential impacts will be prevented.

The Air District Board and Staff have an opportunity to take a proactive strategy to carefully evaluate these potential changes and disclose the full suite of potential impacts of the projects before the projects can be permitted. This will protect the health and well being of all Bay Area communities.

For more information, go to www.cbecal.org.

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Communities for A Better Environment, 350 Bay Area/Chevron Watch, Sunflower Alliance, Richmond Environmental Justice Coalition, Refinery Action Collaborative, Richmond Progressive Alliance, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Sierra Club, Forest Ethics, Green Action for Health and Environmental Health, OccupySF Environmental Justice Working Group and OccupySF Action Council, representatives from Oil Project towns of Benicia, Pittsburg, Rodeo, Richmond and Martinez, and many others.