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Youth Groups Settle Lawsuit Challenging L.A.'s Oil Drilling Approvals

City Implements New Procedures to Promote Compliance With State Laws in Oil Permitting

LOS ANGELES— Youth groups and community organizations today announced a settlement of an unprecedented lawsuit accusing the City of Los Angeles of allowing oil companies to drill near homes and schools without complying with anti-discriminatory protections or conducting environmental review required by the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”).

That suit, filed last November by Youth for Environmental Justice, the South Central Youth Leadership Coalition, and the Center for Biological Diversity, alleged that the City routinely approved oil drilling applications without complying with CEQA, and exposed black and Latino residents to disproportionate health and safety risks by imposing inferior conditions for drill sites in areas with a vast majority of people of color, like Wilmington and South Los Angeles.

The Planning Department implemented new procedures and guidelines, prior to the settlement, intended to ensure that the city complies with CEQA when permitting oil wells. Those guidelines acknowledge that oil drilling can “create unique risks and hazards” and “have significant and immediate impacts on the health, safety and welfare of the residents in and around the project site.” Proper compliance with CEQA’s environmental study and community right-to-know protections are important steps towards preventing future racial discrimination in the oil drilling program.

The South Central Youth Leadership Coalition stated, “we are proud of our City of Angels for taking such a defining step toward protecting our health and our environment from the constant assault by the oil industry. As youth, we are fueled by this victory to continue our fight to end neighborhood drilling.”

Under the new procedures, the City will not issue permits for oil drilling without providing the public with notice and a hearing, and will examine the project's potential health, safety and environmental threats. If the City finds the project could affect people’s health or the environment, oil companies will also be required to take steps to reduce pollution, dust, noise, truck traffic, diesel fumes and other problems caused by their projects, as required by CEQA.

“The youth of color who live with the health and safety risks from oil drilling in their neighborhoods courageously asserted their rights against the City. The City Attorney’s Office did right by taking a hard look at the City’s practices, leading to the

implementation of new procedures to ensure compliance with state laws and the public's welfare," stated Gladys Limón, Staff Attorney at Communities for a Better Environment.

Anthony Fernandez of Youth for Environmental Justice stated that the new policies and procedures are "a victory for the youth who stepped up to protect their communities." He added that "the City's new policies will increase transparency in the oil industry practices, and also create an important stepping stone for other communities facing similar problems."

The [lawsuit](#) noted that the City of L.A. previously allowed oil companies to drill hundreds of oil wells in residential neighborhoods across the city without assessing health and environmental threats linked to conventional drilling and extreme extraction techniques, like acidizing. It charged that the the city had a longstanding practice of rubberstamping oil projects as exempt from CEQA, California's most comprehensive environmental law.

Oil operations in Los Angeles commonly employ toxic chemicals known to cause respiratory diseases, cancer and other health problems. Young people of color living in low-income neighborhoods are most impacted by oil drilling, since they are more likely to live in communities already facing disproportionate environmental and health risks. Children and people with asthma and heart conditions are especially susceptible to health effects from pollutants associated with oil and gas development.

Hundreds of thousands of Angelenos live within one mile of an oil well. In Wilmington, for example, the city authorized more than 540 oil wells without conducting an environmental study. In South Los Angeles, the Jefferson drill site has 33 active wells, with the nearest home only 3 feet away and an elementary school a little over 700 feet from the site's boundary. Residents in these neighborhoods often experience health problems including headaches, skin rashes and severe asthma.

"L.A.'s new procedures are a major victory for people threatened by petroleum pollution," said Maya Golden-Krasner, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. "Oil extraction is a toxic industrial activity that endangers the health of millions of people in our state, and it's time to move quickly toward cleaner, safer sources of energy."

"We're pleased to have worked with the community and Planning Department to advance environmental justice by better protecting the health of our residents near oil facilities," said Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer.

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Youth for Environmental Justice (Youth-EJ) is a youth membership group with hundreds of high school and college student members in Southeast Los Angeles and Wilmington committed to securing environmental justice in their communities.

South Central Youth Leadership Coalition (SCYLC) is a grassroots group that grew organically in response and in defense of the health and safety of community members

impacted by oil and natural gas extraction by the AllenCo Energy excavations. SCYLC's mission is to work with all youth and collaborative allies in advocating for the environmental health, safety, and overall, human rights of the South Central Los Angeles community.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.1 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

The plaintiffs' attorneys are: Gladys Limón, Communities for a Better Environment; Adam Wolf, Pfeiffer Rosca Wolf Abdullah Carr & Kane; Maya Golden-Krasner and Kassia R. Siegel, The Center for Biological Diversity; and Deepak Gupta, Gupta Wessler PLLC.