



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland, Tours Idle and Orphan Oil Wells in Wilmington, CA**

Wilmington, CA-- United States Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland traveled to California this week, making stops in Wilmington, an environmental justice neighborhood in the Harbor region of Los Angeles, California. Secretary Haaland is the first Native American to hold a cabinet position and first Secretary of the Interior to join Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) for a toxic tour to bear witness to the adverse health and safety impacts associated with neighborhood oil drilling, and the threat that idle and orphan oil wells pose to frontline communities.

The City of Los Angeles has a major problem with plugging its idle oil wells and is home to hundreds of sites that have posed a significant risk to the community for decades due to lack of proper oversight and negligence by oil companies. Idle wells can leak toxic, carcinogenic, and flammable/explosive gases into neighborhoods and leach contaminants into drinking waters. Plugging oil wells guards against groundwater contamination and prevents toxic emissions like greenhouse gases from escaping and expediting climate change. After wells are plugged, the land must be cleaned and remediated so the land can benefit the community. “We are appreciative that Secretary Haaland is determined to help frontline communities in their struggle to create safer and healthier neighborhoods,” said **Darryl Molina Sarmiento, Executive Director of CBE**. “We look forward to this collaboration with Department of Interior as we seek resources to make our communities whole.”

During Secretary Haaland’s visit to Wilmington, she walked through neighborhoods marked by active, idle, and orphan oil drilling sites. CBE staff pointed out that not only is Wilmington heavily impacted by oil drilling operations, but these operations occur alongside other cumulative forms of pollution such as refineries, multiple freeways, two major ports, and other industrial operations.

Following CBE’s toxic tour, Secretary Haaland held a listening session at the CBE Office in Wilmington with impacted community members and community-based groups. Secretary Haaland listened intently to participant’s stories, concerns, and suggestions towards creating more accountability and transparency in the agency as well as supporting frontline communities towards identifying win-win solutions for advancing climate justice and equitable transition towards clean energy jobs that supports workers and communities. She listened deeply and provided thoughtful remarks emphasizing the need to center community needs during our country’s transition to a clean energy future.

Pictures of D. Haaland’s visit can be found [here](#).

**Communities for a Better Environment (CBE)** is one of the preeminent environmental justice organizations in the nation. The mission of CBE is to build people’s power in California’s low-income communities of color to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution by building green, healthy, and sustainable communities and environments. [www.cbeocal.org](http://www.cbeocal.org)

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