

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 13, 2017

Media/Press Contacts:

Lupe Martinez (bilingual), 661-979-5738, lmartinez@crpe-ej.org

Catherine Garoupa White, 559-232-1698, Catherine@californiansagainstfracking.org

Impacted Residents Attend Hearing Against Rubberstamping Decades of Dangerous Drilling in Kern County

BAKERSIFELD, *Calif* – Community members and advocates turned out today to attend the first of several days of hearings contesting a Kern County ordinance that rubberstamps oil and gas projects and related practices for decades. In 2015, Kern County amended its oil and gas ordinance to rubberstamp the construction of well pads, drilling operations, pipelines, and fracking and other well stimulation methods that use toxic chemicals. Furthermore, Kern County violated its fundamental responsibility to inform the community by disregarding requests to involve Spanish-speaking residents during the review process.

“Kern County has the highest rate of oil production out of any county in California. It has polluted our air, water, environment and our food, which gets exported across the country. Now the oil industry is asking for the legal right to build more wells, extract oil faster and without having to submit the most basic environmental and health testing. We are demanding that today Kern County stand on the side of its people. Choose human health over the minimal profits of a dying industry,” said Anabel Marquez, a community member from Shafter.

The county also issued a single Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to permit all oil and gas operations without further environmental review for the next 20 or more years. The EIR covers more than 70,000 future wells as one project, with no opportunity for further environmental review. The oil industry wrote these rules, and the Kern County Board of Supervisors adopted them wholesale.

“This ordinance essentially puts aside the protections provided in the California Environmental Quality Act for the next 20 plus years on behalf of the oil and gas industry,” said Gustavo Aguirre Jr., Kern County Project Coordinator with the Central California Environmental Justice Network. “How do food vendors in Kern County regularly have to undergo health inspections, while the oil industry gets the greenlight to expand without any further review of their impacts to public health and the environment?”

The ordinance will cause a significant, cumulative increase in air pollution and greenhouse gases—including an increase in air pollutants for which the county currently violates health standards. Kern County is already the most polluted area in the nation for particle pollution, and second most polluted for ozone pollution, with severe impacts to public health.

“Kern County has consistently chosen the oil industry over the health of the people, as was demonstrated by their 2015 decision to streamline oil and gas permitting at dangerous rates. The oil and fracking industry has polluted our environment and our economy,” stated Lupe Martinez,

Assistant Director at the Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment. “The people of Kern County have a right to clean air, water and a higher quality of life. Today we continue to challenge the Kern County Board of Supervisor’s decision to put the oil and fracking industry before the health of our people and future generations.”

“California cannot claim to be a climate leader and leave Kern County communities behind,” said Catherine Garoupa White, Coordinator for Californians Against Fracking & Dangerous Drilling. “Kern County’s air pollution problem and related health impacts as well as ample climate science demonstrate that we must move quickly toward a just transition away from fossil fuels.”

###