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Public Utilities Commission Affirms Energy Companies Must Consider Environmental Justice

Communities Welcome Proposed Decision to Reject Proposed Power Plant

San Francisco, CA | January 12, 2016 — Yesterday the California Public Utilities Commission issued a proposed decision that, at this time, would refuse to approve the contract between Southern California Edison and NRG for a new gas-fired power plant in Oxnard. The decision was welcomed by Oxnard residents and environmental justice advocates who have fought the proposal of yet another power plant in this community.

The decision affirms the environmental justice issues at stake with the proposed power plant. Oxnard, where NRG would locate the plant, is a low-income community, already overburdened by existing power plants and pollution sources. The decision holds that utilities must consider environmental justice, both when contracting for renewable resources that bring benefits to a community, and when contracting for gas-fired power plants that impose pollution burdens. The decision observes that it is not clear the utility made that consideration.

"Every time we build another polluting power plant, we take a step away from the growing potential of renewable energy that can power up California. California needs to stop plugging into dirty energy and power up our communities with clean renewable energy. Local renewable energy brings good jobs and economic investments into communities that need it the most. We are thrilled that the proposed decision values communities that have the most at stake with the Oxnard Power Plant."

Strela Cervas, Co-Director, California Environmental Justice Alliance

"We're one step closer to a clean Oxnard and getting rid of the pollution we've been burdened with for years. The voices of our community calling for clean, renewable energy are being heard."

Evelyn Melgoza, high school senior, Oxnard resident, member of Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy

"Hundreds of residents have spoken out against Oxnard being burdened with yet another dirty power plant. This is a sign that the CPUC is listening."

Lucas Zucker, Policy and Communications Director, Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy

"The Commission is recognizing that utilities have a legal duty to consider environmental justice, and moving in the right direction to ensure that happens. The next step will be to require SCE to carry out the meaningful analysis, before it awards any contracts."

Gladys Limón, Lawyer, Communities for a Better Environment

The CPUC will keep open the proceeding, allowing SCE to return if the California Energy Commission approves the NRG plant. At that point, the CPUC would have more information to evaluate whether the plant would be safe, in light of climate change and sea level rise.

The proposed decision is scheduled to be heard by the Commission on February 11, 2016. The Commission will receive comments on whether to adopt this proposed decision over the next weeks.

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California Environmental Justice Alliance is a statewide, community-led alliance that works to achieve environmental justice by advancing policy solutions. We unite the powerful local organizing of our members in the communities most impacted by environmental hazards – low-income communities and communities of color - to create comprehensive opportunities for change at a statewide level. We build the power of communities across California to create policies that will alleviate poverty and pollution. Together, we are growing the statewide movement for environmental health and social justice. www.caleja.org

Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy builds grassroots power to invoke social, economic, and environmental justice for the people of California's Central Coast region through policy research, leadership development, organizing, and advocacy. CAUSE defines the Central Coast region as the counties of Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito. www.causenow.org

Communities for a Better Environment works in low-income Latino and African American communities in Oakland, Richmond, Wilmington and Huntington Park. CBE combines community organizing, science-based advocacy, and legal intervention into a uniquely effective single strategy to successfully impact change in these target communities and develop campaigns to address health hazards in the community. www.cbecal.org