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California communities mount protests against fracking, oil drilling *Kern County family sues California governor, charging fracking regulations discriminate against Latinos*

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LOS ANGELES – More than 100 children, parents and community organizers in fluorescent yellowish-green shirts and orange shoe covers marched through a South Los Angeles neighborhood earlier this week chanting, “Hey, hey, ho, ho, this drilling site has got to go!”

The canaries-in-a-coal-mine color-scheme of the protesters was intentional. There was even a giant cage in front of an oil drilling site on West Jefferson Boulevard that neighborhood children, most of them African American or Latino, crammed into, holding up signs asking to “Set these canaries free.”

Protests over conventional oil drilling and hydraulic fracturing – known as fracking – near schools and homes in poor minority neighborhoods are now reaching new heights across California as more studies show [that drilling for oil disproportionately takes place in poor communities of color](#).

Last week, a Kern County family [filed suit against California Gov. Jerry Brown](#) and state regulators charging that the state’s [new fracking regulations](#) do not protect the health of Latino students in public schools because they still permit wells nearby.

Fracking is a type of well stimulation that injects chemical-laced water into the ground to extract oil or gas. The regulations will increase monitoring and reporting but will not stop fracking.

A [report by the California Council on Science and Technology](#) released earlier this month basically found that there is not enough information about chemicals used in fracking and their potential danger to health and the environment. For example, no agencies are monitoring whether the wastewater from fracking operations is treated before it seeps into the groundwater from unlined dump pits or is used to irrigate crops.

The lawsuit, filed by the [Center on Race, Poverty & The Environment](#), argues that fracking regulations that went into effect July 1 unintentionally violate the state’s anti-discrimination laws by not banning fracking in close proximity to schools.



“California guarantees all children the right to an education but also equal education,” said Madeline Stano, staff attorney with the center that filed the lawsuit. “We are the first case that we’re aware of that’s really linking oil and gas activity and civil rights issues under existing civil rights laws.”

The state prohibits intentional or unintentional discrimination on the basis of race. Don Drysdale, with the California Department of Conservation, responded in an e-mail: “Neither the Department nor the Governor’s Office have comment on this pending litigation.”

More than 60 percent of the 61,612 children who attend California schools within one mile of a stimulated well are Latino, according to the center. Statewide, Latino students are more than 18 percent more likely to attend a school within a mile and a half of a fracking operation than non-Latino students.

“Governor Brown and our state regulatory agencies have failed to protect public school students and our state as a whole by adopting regulations that do not address the existing racially disparate impact of well stimulations on Latino students,” Stano said.

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Madeline Stano

Center on Race, Poverty & The Environment

The [plaintiff in this case is Rodrigo Romo](#), who claims that his two daughters were exposed to dangerous levels of toxic pollution and psychological stress from fracking operations near public schools they attended in Shafter and Wasco, California.

Both have asthma and the youngest has experienced epileptic seizures, conditions that led her to stop playing soccer. One of the fracking wells is less than 1,200 feet from a school. “Three wells you can see from their playground,” Stano said. “You can feel the vibration. You can smell the chemicals.”

Conditions are so bad, she said, that students often have to move indoors for recess. Here in South Los Angeles, an area that’s 60 percent Hispanic and 30 percent black, the issue is not fracking but conventional oil drilling, which also involves the use of chemicals.

“It’s the same issue as fracking,” said Kevin Blue, senior pastor of Church of the Redeemer, one of two black churches that helped organize the protest at two neighborhood drilling sites. “They’re putting poison in the ground. We’d love it if they shut it down.”



Single-family homes abut the drilling sites.

“They’re three feet from people’s homes,” said Aimee Dewing, one of the organizers with Stand Together Against Neighborhood Drilling (S.T.A.N.D. L.A.). “Acid trucks roll down the street. On one side, you see workers in hazmat suits and on the other side, people are in their yard grilling.”

There has never been an environmental impact report done on either of the two sites, the main demand of residents who also oppose the proposed addition of a gas burner at a nearby drilling operation on West Adams Boulevard.

“It really is an environmental justice issue,” Blue said.

“Most of our congregation live within a square mile,” said the father of three, who lives half a mile west of the oil drilling site.

Drilling has been taking place in this neighborhood right next to homes since the 1960s. “A lot the adults decided to accept it,” Blue said, which is why neighborhood activists are now training children in the art of protests, using the same strategies utilized in the civil rights movement more than half a century ago.

The elementary- and middle-school students are attending the Adventures Ahead summer program run by Blue’s church and Holman United Methodist Church. They have spent the summer learning about social movements and the role children can play in advancing social justice and educating the community.

Timeka Drew, the mother of two boys attending the program, marched alongside the children.

Even though she has lived in the neighborhood six years, “I had no idea so many drilling sites were so close by.”

People of color experience 70 percent more particulate matter emissions because they live within two and a half miles of major gas emitters, said Strela Cervas, co-director of the [California Environmental Justice Alliance](#), which represents more than 20,000 people in communities across the state.

“The communities that are hit first and worst by climate change and fracking are communities of color and, disproportionately, low-income communities of color,” she said. “The communities we work with live and breathe the realities and that hasn’t been reflected in state policies.”



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Kelvin Sauls, senior pastor at the Holman Methodist church, said this week's protests are not just about race.

"There's racism plus classism going on," he said. "Discrimination and exploitation is not just a race thing."

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/7/24/california-communities-mount-protests-against-fracking-oil-drilling.html#>