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Low-Income Communities Will Be Hit Hardest If We Don't Wean Off Fossil Fuels

As a lifelong resident of Oxnard, California, I have experienced the true costs of pollution first hand. My community has been fighting a proposed gas power plant on the coast of the city for years.

Not only would this plant burn fossil fuels that would contribute to climate change, worsening California's already catastrophic drought, it would also create toxic pollution. That pollution is known to worsen asthma, a condition my brother has struggled with for years.

Perhaps the most disturbing fact about Oxnard's situation is that it is not unique. Because these types of plants are typically built near working-class communities of color, pollution-based health problems are far more prevalent within our communities.

Far too often, conversations about oil and gas power leave out the effects of those fuels on low-income communities and communities of color—many of whom are suffering from sky-high asthma and cancer rates.



The fossil fuel industry's anxiety about reducing reliance on their product is apparent, especially given their ads against Kevin De Leon's proposed bill, the [Clean Energy and Pollution Reduction Act of 2015 \(SB 350\)](#). SB 350 would increase our state's commitment to stopping climate change and ensure that communities of color have access to the same clean air, renewable energy, and better public health as everyone else.

My city of Oxnard, a predominantly low-income Latino community, already has three coastal power plants—more than any other city in California and far more than our fair share of pollution and health problems as a result. The city has been used as a dumping ground for the most polluting projects in the Central Coast—like [the Halaco Superfund toxic waste site](#). Our strawberry fields are home to some of the highest levels of dangerous pesticide use in the state.

The SB 350 bill represents an opportunity for our state to go in a new direction, allowing us all to avoid toiling away to stop yet another toxic power plant in our backyard, and it can also reverse our destructive reliance on fossil fuels. SB 350 will protect communities with high levels of poverty and unemployment and help develop renewable energy. This means that we could install solar panels in our neighborhoods, instead of relying on asthma-producing and drought-inducing fossil fuels.





SB 350 would increase renewable energy by 50%, reduce petroleum use by 50%, and double energy efficiency by the year 2030—and I don't see why we should allow oil companies to stop that when people's lives and health are on the line in neighborhoods like mine.

I love Oxnard and our beautiful coastline. I'm fed up watching it be polluted and exploited by corporations who care more about their bottom line than my brother's asthma or our state's drought. Our communities are suffering the worse effects of air pollution and climate change than ever before. It's time for our elected leaders in the state Capitol to stand up to big oil and gas and vote yes on SB 350.

Our lives depend on it.



Evelyn García is a Senior at Hueneme High School and lifelong resident of Oxnard, California. For over three years, she has been involved in community activism with the [Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy \(CAUSE\)](#)