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California Public Utilities Commission Sides With Utility Companies in Approval of Puente Power Plant

*Communities Outraged by Disregard of Disproportionate Burdens
in Siting of Fourth Power Plant in Oxnard*

San Francisco, CA | May 26, 2016 — Today the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) approved a contract for a new power plant on Oxnard's coast. Community residents and advocates are dismayed by the decision which continues a discriminatory pattern of dumping the region's pollution in communities of color. The contract now goes to the California Energy Commission (CEC) for environmental review.

For nearly two years, local community residents in Oxnard have fought the proposal of another dirty power plant on their coast, mobilizing widespread support in opposition to the proposal. A broad coalition, including environmental justice organizations and clean tech groups, have called on Governor Brown to exercise his authority and advise the CPUC to uphold its legal mandate to address environmental justice and protect low-income communities like Oxnard.

The CPUC is the only agency with regulatory authority and oversight duties over utility companies to ensure that they consider environmental justice when approving contracts for power plants. The decision comes after community residents applauded an initial proposed decision that affirmed environmental justice policies and requirements. The initial proposed decision also recognized that project site's exposure to sea-level rise and coastal flooding merited further review before a long-term project could be approved. However, last month, CPUC commissioner Carla Peterman issued a proposed decision to allow Southern California Edison (SCE) and NRG to move forward with a contract to build the Oxnard power plant.

Since release of those proposed decisions, CPUC commissioners have been subjected to relentless industry lobbying and political pressure urging them to put industry interests before the health and well-being of residents. Oxnard, where NRG seeks to locate the plant, is a low-income community, already overburdened by existing power plants and other pollution sources.

"We are deeply disappointed that the CPUC authorized another dirty power plant in Oxnard and ignored environmental justice. This is a significant roll-back on environmental justice protections and sets a dangerous precedent in CPUC decision-making for environmental justice communities across California. Southern California Edison has been lobbying heavily and overburdened communities deserve due process. Now that the issue goes to the California Energy Commission, we demand that they effectuate law and policies that were created to protect the communities most impacted by this decision."

Strela Cervas, Co-Director, California Environmental Justice Alliance

“Oxnard's working-class immigrant families are tired of being picked on by polluting industry, who have used their immense lobbying resources to pressure the California Public Utilities Commissioners to reject Judge DeAngelis' proposed decision. Now it's up to the California Energy Commission to listen to the overwhelming voice of the community opposed to this project, and recognize that Oxnard has long been burdened with the region's most polluting projects. This power plant only continues that racist legacy.”

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

“The CPUC is required to prioritize investments that reduce greenhouse gases and build climate preparedness but went ahead and did just the opposite by approving a new gas plant on a coastal site vulnerable to sea level rise and flooding. California needs clean, distributed resource solutions, not more gas plants like Puente.” **Matt Vespa, Senior Attorney, Sierra Club**

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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

Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 2.4 million members and supporters. In addition to helping people from all backgrounds explore nature and our outdoor heritage, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. www.sierraclub.org