



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ALLIANCE

Environmental Justice Advocates Respond to Life-Threatening Blackouts

Frontline Community Members Call for Faster Deployment of Clean Energy Investment, Storage

August 18, 2020 | California experienced rolling blackouts this weekend as our fossil-fuel based power system failed to support increased demands on the grid. Low-income communities of color, which are already most vulnerable to extreme heat and the COVID-19 pandemic, are bearing the brunt of this energy crisis.

The California Environmental Justice Alliance issued the following statement in response to the CAISO blackouts:

As a member-led alliance whose communities are disproportionately confronting the burdens of economic insecurity, exposure to environmental toxins and the current health crisis, CEJA calls for increased investment in clean energy, storage capacity, and demand response.

Rather than increasing smog this week by turning to diesel and more fossil fuels, industry should reduce operations and electricity use when electricity is most needed. Going forward, we must move faster to get reliable renewable energy systems in place, starting with the most at-risk communities, so that we can retire the fragile, polluting fossil-fueled power plants that failed us this weekend. This means emergency planning to reduce demand, and following environmental justice communities' lead to site renewable resources and energy storage in their communities.

Governor Newsom took a step in the right direction by working with large energy users to reduce energy usage and directing state regulators to dive into the root causes of the outages.¹ Unfortunately, he also temporarily removed air quality protections from fossil-fueled power plants, which are disproportionately located in low-income communities of color.² Diesel backup generators are also being allowed to operate unfettered, putting out enormous amounts of dangerous air pollution into communities already breathing unhealthy air. Further, ships docked at California's ports are temporarily allowed to burn toxic bunker fuel where communities breathe, instead of following hard-won rules to plug in while in port. While we understand these actions were taken as emergency measures, we hope that moving forward, no communities will have to sacrifice their health as a result of poor planning. This is an opportunity for Governor Newsom to strengthen our economy and our health by moving away from outdated energy policy and working for faster procurement of clean energy in environmental justice communities.

"When it's hot and still the air in Wilmington is unbreathable, and a lot of our homes don't have air conditioning or filters. Our communities are under stress from COVID 19 that continues to be weighed down by decision-makers allowing for continuous attacks on our lungs. We are essential workers, families, and communities that need relief as we are battling the mounting

¹ <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/8.17.20-Letter-to-CAISO-PUC-and-CEC.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/8.17.20-EO-N-74-20.pdf>



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crises. We have more refineries nearby than any other California community, and when the power goes out, they flare, polluting our air. We worked hard for years to get pollution from the ports of LA and Long Beach under control, and it is unacceptable to have ships running their engines where we have to breathe! If they can't plug in, ships need to stay at sea," **said Ashley Hernandez, a Wilmington resident and organizer with Communities for a Better Environment.**

Communities need working lights and working lungs. Our reliance on fossil fuels got us to this point, and the solution is to move off them by reducing electricity demand when it matters, and investing in renewable energy and storage. In today's emergency, industry must reduce demand during peak hours, not by using diesel generators but by reducing their energy usage.

"California must invest in resilient energy systems, like microgrids and renewables paired with energy storage, in communities to address air quality and environmental injustice. We know that environmental justice communities will continue to be hit first and worst by the impacts of increasing climate change, so it is vital that we plan **now** how to respond to extreme weather in a way that meets our climate mandates and protects our most vulnerable residents," **said Jose Torres, Energy Equity Manager of the California Environmental Justice Alliance.**

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