

Friday, August 24, 2018

Via Online Submission

California Air Resources Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: August 20th workshop re: Opportunities for Additional Greenhouse Gas Reductions from Petroleum Transportation Fuels

To Whom It May Concern:

We call on the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to take seriously the demands of EJ communities to reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses and criteria air pollutants from petroleum transportation fuels. Every day, petroleum production is exposing thousands to the cancer-causing toxins and endocrine disrupting chemicals used in oil extraction. The inherently dangerous practice of drilling and refining petroleum poses a severe public health threat and represents a violation of basic human and environmental rights.

The narrow focus of the Scoping Plan for AB 32 on greenhouse gas emissions have left frontline communities to suffer the impacts of worsening air pollution and climate change simultaneously. Our organizations represent communities whose health is being sacrificed because they live in close proximity to these operations. We are committed to a just transition off fossil fuels, because public health and climate science mandate that we act quickly to keep hydrocarbons in the ground. We submit these comments to express concerns about both about the information presented and the process by which this meeting was held.

We are gravely concerned by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and partner agencies such as the Department of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) continual dismissal of public health impacts and comparisons to extraction in other countries, making this a “race to the bottom” for who is worst off. Communities in California and in the Ecuadorian Amazon all deserve basic protections. We disagree that existing mechanisms such as cap and trade and current regulations are sufficient, as ample evidence exists of the failure of these programs and of the egregious lack of enforcement in California’s most impacted communities. As just one example, under cap and trade, emissions from oil refineries in the San Joaquin Valley have continued to increase, worsening pollution in one of our nation’s most polluted air basins. Additionally, small producers in the San Joaquin Valley continue to enjoy exemptions from most regulations.

We are not assured by the statements made by Mr. Marshall of DOGGR that production is naturally declining in many of California’s oil fields and no technology currently exists to reach the more difficult to extract deposits. As he also stated, drillers will go where there are resources to extract that are economically viable. No one can forecast future technologies or the price of oil, so these statements do nothing to address current, ongoing impacts to public health. This environmental justice perspective was sorely lacking from the panels and the presentations.

While AB 617 has been held up as a gold standard for addressing air quality, no significant early actions have been committed to, and the related monitoring and research processes will take years if not decades to produce results. We reiterate our previous ask in a letter submitted May 14, 2018¹ that the CARB immediately implement recommendations from the California Council on Science and Technology's 2015 report, such as implementing a health and safety buffer zone around existing and new operations². Operations near homes, schools, and other sensitive land uses must be phased out as soon as possible as we make a just transition to cleaner, renewable energy sources.

In addition to these concerning statements by presenters, the lack of community representation, and the substantial policy and regulatory shortfalls noted herein, the process of the meeting itself had several shortcomings. Materials were not available until just a few days in advance, over the weekend, giving little time for review. The meeting itself involved approximately 4 hours of presentations, with a mere 30 minutes for public comment at the end. The meeting was held during the day, in Sacramento, far from the communities most heavily impacted by fossil fuel infrastructure. Online comments are due by the same Friday at 5 pm, providing less than a week to review and respond to a wide breadth of information covered. We would encourage more time for public comments and interaction with staff on the materials presented. We would welcome workshops held on these subjects in other parts of the state, particularly in environmental justice communities.

Local public health and environmental impacts cannot be left out of the equation when considering opportunities to reduce GHGs from petroleum transportation fuels. We urge you to take these impacts seriously and engage more deeply and thoroughly in a process that not only includes frontline voices, but that substantively addresses the connections between local public health impacts and the impacts of worsening climate change, since these communities are already suffering under these interconnected and worsening burdens. The core mission of the CARB is, after all, to “promote and protect public health, welfare and ecological resources through the effective and efficient reduction of air pollutants” first and foremost.

Sincerely,

Dr. Catherine Garoupa White
Coordinator, Californians Against Fracking and Dangerous Drilling

Nayamín Martínez
Director, Central California Environmental Justice Network

¹ Letter Re: Request for the Community Air Protection Program Framework to Implement Recommendations of the California Council on Science and Technology Regarding Oil and Gas Extraction Operations

² California Council on Science and Technology. (2015). An Independent Scientific Assessment of Well Stimulation in California. Executive summary at: <https://ccst.us/publications/2015/2015SB4-v2ES.pdf>