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Backyard Oil Drilling Affects Thousands in LA

LA County Fails to Ensure Public Health is Protected from Hazardous Industry

LOS ANGELES (November 25, 2008) – Thousands of residents living near Baldwin Hills may soon be exposed to serious health risks if Texas-based oil company, Plains Exploration and Production Company (PXP) is allowed to expand their drilling projects, according to a lawsuit filed today by Community Health Councils, Inc. (CHC) and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). The lawsuit against the County of Los Angeles challenges the County for failing to provide adequate health and environmental safeguards against the dangers of expanded oil drilling operations in the densely populated south Los Angeles and Culver City neighborhoods.

The lawsuit involves a set of protective measures known as the Baldwin Hills Community Standards District (CSD), which is intended to regulate oil drilling and production activities in Baldwin Hills. In the lawsuit, the citizen groups claim that the County violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by failing to conduct an adequate environmental impact report (EIR) before adopting the CSD.

Following is a statement by Damon Nagami, staff attorney for NRDC:

“It’s clear the County and PXP tried to make it as difficult as possible for community members to voice their concern over the oil drilling in their backyards. The County violated the law and put thousands of lives at risk to expand unnecessary oil drilling.”

Following is a statement by Lark Galloway-Gilliam, executive director, Community Health Councils, Inc.:

“The County squandered the two year moratorium on drilling and then rushed the environmental review process. Despite requests to extend the review process by state and local agencies and pleas from the community to circulate the outdated environmental report, as required by law, the County decided to approve the project anyway.”

Background

In January 2006, uncontrolled emissions of noxious gas from the Baldwin Hills Oil Field caused the evacuation of dozens of people and affected more than 500 homes in adjacent neighborhoods. A similar incident occurred a month later, in February 2006.

Community action resulting from the two incidents prompted the County to adopt emergency restrictions on PXP’s operations and eventually led to a temporary moratorium on new well drilling through October 2008. In an effort to hinder public review, PXP failed to submit its draft CSD in a timely fashion, delaying the environmental review process and causing the County to rush through what should have been a thorough review process. With the agreement to refrain from drilling set to expire October 2008, the County chose to approve the inadequate CSD document last month, to allow expanded drilling without sufficient oversight and protections for the community and environment.

The lawsuit challenges the County vote authorizing PXP to develop 600 new oil wells during the next 20 years in Baldwin Hills without any further public hearings or environmental review.

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The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has 1.2 million members and online activists, served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Beijing.



Community Health Councils, Inc. is a non-profit community based health promotion and policy organization located in the Crenshaw district of South Los Angeles. CHC is dedicated to increasing access to health and quality healthcare for underserved communities in Los Angeles and across the state of California.