

# The Examiner

## Dirty oil stains California's climate leadership

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After touting California's climate leadership to the world at the United Nations climate conference in Germany, Gov. Jerry Brown addressed a home crowd last week at the ClimateTECH conference in San Francisco. However, just as in Germany, demonstrators gathered with banners denouncing the governor's oil-friendly policies. Many of these activists are from the communities hardest hit by oil and gas operations in our state.

That raises a critical question: How badly does Brown's support for oil production mar California's climate leadership? To answer that, the Center for Biological Diversity recently analyzed oil production in the Golden State to determine how dirty and climate-damaging crude production really is.

The results are deeply troubling.

Our analysis found that three-quarters of the oil produced in California is, barrel for barrel, as climate-damaging as Canada's notoriously dirty tar sands crude. In fact, eight of the state's 10 largest-producing oil fields extract more than a hundred million barrels each year of some of the world's most carbon-intensive crude.



Thousands of pumpjacks are seen at Kern River Oil Field in Bakersfield, Calif., one of the most dense oil fields in the United States. (Courtesy photo)

Nearly two-thirds of remaining reserves in 18 of the largest oilfields in the Los Angeles and San Joaquin basins are similarly climate-damaging, totaling 6.1 billion barrels of particularly polluting crude.

A major reason why California's oil is so carbon-intensive is that much of it is heavy and difficult to extract. The oil industry has increasingly used extreme extraction techniques like fracking and steam flooding — involving high energy inputs and large volumes of water — worsening the climate impacts of the state's oil production.

California's dirty oil fields not only fuel climate change, but they endanger the health of surrounding communities. Oil drilling operations spew toxic chemicals into the air and water. Living close to drilling sites is associated with a higher risk of cancer, asthma, birth defects and other serious health problems.

This is alarming because 14 percent of the state's population lives within a mile of at least one oil or gas well, meaning that drilling operates dangerously close to millions of Californians. Of particular concern, drilling occurs disproportionately in low-income communities of color already overburdened by pollution.

Yet, the governor has no plan or policies in place to ramp down California's dirty oil production.

To the contrary, Brown's policies have encouraged aggressive oil development in the state through massive tax breaks for the oil industry, weak regulation and lax oversight. California is the nation's third-largest oil-producing state. And California's oil regulators issue thousands of new drilling permits each year, with no end in sight.

California is only one of two states that does not impose an oil extraction tax, lining the pockets of an industry that uses profits to fund climate-change denial.

Brown has refused to ban fracking — a dangerous technique that uses toxic chemicals and spurs more oil production — despite the fact that six California counties and three states have already banned the harmful practice.

Brown administration officials are seeking "aquifer exemptions" from the federal Safe Drinking Water Act to allow oil companies to dump toxic waste into our underground water supplies and facilitate more drilling.

These oil-friendly policies fuel climate change, endanger Californians and stifle our transition to clean energy. California must phase out the state's dirty oil production in the next several decades. And we must start now.

Necessary steps include banning fracking and halting new drilling permits and oil field expansion. California must end neighborhood drilling and eliminate subsidies to the oil industry, investing that money instead in the transition to a just, clean-energy future.

Brown has resisted these changes. His excuse: Californians drive a lot, he says, so we have to keep fracking the state's oil wells. Curbing oil consumption is essential, and California can make a big difference by banning the sale of fossil fuel vehicles by 2025, following Norway's lead, while investing in public transportation and expanding programs to make sure electric vehicles are affordable for everyone.

But slashing oil production is equally vital. The bottom line is that California can't be a true climate leader while producing millions of barrels a year of some of the planet's most climate-damaging crude.

To truly set a good example on the global stage, Brown and other state leaders must phase out dirty oil production here at home.