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Proposal would allow companies to build 40,000 new oil wells in Kern

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. (KGET) — On Monday, the County Board of Supervisors will hold a public hearing on a revised ordinance that would create a streamlined permitting process for future oil and gas drilling in Kern County. Supporters say the proposal will provide the industry with regulatory clarity, while allowing thousands of new wells in Kern. Environmental groups are fighting tooth and nail to prevent it.

Kern Citizens for Energy says the county needs more oil jobs, promoting a local ordinance that would allow companies to build more than 40-thousand oil wells over the next 15 years.

“Our region is the lynchpin,” said Nick Ortiz, the President and CEO of the Greater Bakersfield Chamber. “It’s providing the resources that really provide for our entire 21st-century way of life.”

The group says this ordinance would create 25,000 jobs.

“Society cannot be funded by fantasy,” said Dave Noerr, Mayor of Taft. “Services to the taxpayers, the things that everyone takes for granted, all cost money. Remove the oil and gas? Anybody familiar with Kern County’s budget right now knows that would be a critical hit.

Environmental experts say the new oil wells could further damage Kern’s already polluted air. A state appeals court struck down a similar measure in 2015 for violating environmental laws.

“There is benzene and all kinds of harmful chemicals that can be emitted from oil and gas activity,” said Hollin Kretzmann, a Senior Attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity. “A Harvard study showed that in a single year, 34,000 premature deaths in California can be attributed to this oil and gas activity.

Kretzmann warns oil drilling batters some communities harder than others.

“Many of these dangerous, polluting activities happen where low-income communities and communities of color are,” said Kretzmann. “So disproportionately, these are the folks that suffer from rampant air pollution, water pollution, noise and light pollution that come from these operations.”

The board of supervisors will consider the revised ordinance and take public input during a hearing on Monday.