

<https://www.kget.com/news/community-and-environmental-groups-sue-kern-county-following-vote-to-allow-thousands-of-new-oil-wells/>

Community and environmental groups sue Kern County following vote to allow thousands of new oil wells

LOCAL NEWS

Posted: Mar 11, 2021 / 12:54 PM PST / Updated: Mar 11, 2021 / 02:42 PM PST

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. (KGET) — Community and environmental groups filed a [lawsuit](#) Wednesday challenging Kern County's adoption of an ordinance that would allow tens of thousands of new oil wells over the next 15 years.

Adopted unanimously Monday by the Kern County Board of Supervisors, the ordinance allows for roughly 40,000 new oil and gas wells by 2036. The lawsuit petitioners, including the Committee for a Better Arvin, Committee for a Better Shafter, Comité Progreso de Lamont, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, and Center for Biological Diversity, are hoping to reverse the decision.

“This ordinance is a disaster for public health in Kern County, particularly for low-income communities and Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other communities of color that live next to oil wells and are already harmed daily by fossil fuel pollution,” said Chelsea Tu, senior attorney at the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, which represents the Committee for a Better Arvin, Committee for a Better Shafter, and Comité Progreso de Lamont in the lawsuit. “Kern communities are bringing this lawsuit in order to protect their families because the county has failed to do so.”

“We’re suing to protect community members from this blatant disregard of the need for a thorough and honest environmental review,” said Ann Alexander, a senior attorney at Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). “Kern County deserves better than a rubberstamped fossil fuel nightmare for years to come.”

Ally Triolo, the county’s chief communications officer, said, “We’re confident in our work and our project, and beyond that, the County is not providing any further comment on this pending litigation.”

Ordinance supporters argued the new wells will bring the county more revenue in property taxes and Kern Citizens for Energy has said the ordinance will create jobs.

5th District Supervisor Leticia Perez noted Monday part of the soul of Kern County is enmeshed in the oil industry. She said the oil and gas industry has served as a way out of intergenerational poverty for many local residents.

“I think tonight is a night to celebrate,” she said. “I enthusiastically and proudly support this recommendation.”

3rd District Supervisor Mike Maggard said the demand for oil will remain stable or go up for many years to come. He said it would not make sense to trade “the cleanest oil produced in the most clean fashion, probably in the world” for dirty imported oil.

Environmental experts have argued the wells could further pollute Kern’s air — ranked among the most polluted in the country — leading to more health issues for the county.