



The Power of Persistence

The Fight to End
Neighborhood Oil Drilling
in Los Angeles

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Report Prepared By

Liberty Hill
FOUNDATION

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The Power of Persistence: The Fight to End Neighborhood Oil Drilling in Los Angeles



Artwork by Eric Junker courtesy of Patagonia

INTRODUCTION

By Michele Prichard, Andres Gonzalez and Angelo Logan, *Liberty Hill Foundation*

Progress to end neighborhood oil drilling in Los Angeles has been a long time coming. An uncertain journey still lies before us. Yet, through the power of persistence, we are making history.

Initially sparked by a series of site-by-site battles waged by organizers and neighbors from Jefferson Park to University Park to the Baldwin Hills to Wilmington, our campaign has grown into a unified and increasingly powerful force for change, now reverberating across California.

In 2010, when the neighbors near the AllenCo Energy drill site first suspected that the industrial operation next door might be causing their nausea and nosebleeds, they had little idea that their struggle would eventually turn into a countywide movement to end oil drilling. Neither did the families living next to the Jefferson drill site who could look at the oil rig outside their kitchen window, nor the residents in Wilmington with oil pumps in backyards and church parking lots, nor the homeowners living adjacent to the Inglewood Oil Field (the largest urban oil field in the country). None of these communities originally intended or

imagined they could ever build the power to challenge the industry, legislators, and the regulatory bureaucracy. In the beginning, they were simply trying to protect their health, and the health of their families and neighbors. Back then, it was unthinkable that oil drilling—with its historic legacy in Los Angeles, which once produced more oil than Saudi Arabia—could be ended due to its harmful health impacts.

After uniting as STAND-L.A. (Stand Together Against Neighborhood Drilling) in 2014, the collective work and struggle of community-based organizations has turned the tide for environmental justice in Los Angeles. In December 2022, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously voted to prohibit all new drilling and phase-out existing drilling throughout the city. In January 2023, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors followed suit, unanimously voting to do the same in unincorporated LA County, with future actions anticipated to extend and implement the county's ban and phase-out.

Looking to the Future

Even with these victories, significant work needs to be done to ensure that all Angelenos can breathe clean air and realize the benefits of a phasing-out of fossil fuels. Together, we must:

- 1. Accelerate the phase-out timeline** to close oil drilling facilities as soon as possible and reduce the risk to fenceline residents;
- 2. Take immediate action to implement strong health protections** at all oil drilling facilities during the phase-out period, protecting nearby residents, especially low-income people of color who continue to experience disproportionate exposure to harm;
- 3. Provide for a just transition** for workers to move into comparable, family-sustaining jobs in the green economy, and for neighboring communities to help ensure safe and proper clean-up and bioremediation of the sites, while determining the future land use to meet their needs for open space, affordable housing, small business revitalization, and repatriation of native land.



Community leaders and residents hold press conference on steps of Los Angeles City Hall.

Learning from our Past

Many strategies woven together over many years highlight how social change movements can build successful policy campaigns, improve people's lives, and make the unimaginable possible. They include:

Community organizing to assure that the experience of those closest to the impacts of oil pollution and the pain of injustice are central to the campaign's vision and voice. Black Women for Wellness, Communities for a Better Environment, Esperanza Community Housing, Holman United Methodist Church, Redeemer Community Partnership, and Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education have served as the leading community-based organizations in the STAND-L.A. coalition. They knock on doors, make phone calls, write letters, organize church and community meetings, sponsor rallies and teach-ins, and speak at press conferences and public hearings—always lifting up the daily harms faced by frontline neighbors and centering their voices in demanding better living conditions. As we enter a new phase of dreaming about future land uses for former oil sites, these organizers will cultivate the community's vision and wisdom to help determine the next chapter.

. . . the collective work and struggle of community-based organizations has turned the tide for environmental justice in Los Angeles.

Science-based research to inform the public as well as build decision-makers' understanding of the problem and help shape policy solutions. STAND-L.A. benefited early on from the health expertise of Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles, including their member doctors, nurses and other health professionals who testified about the negative health impacts of living close to oil drilling. Occidental College and University of Southern California researchers analyzed the proximity of different population groups to demonstrate that the most vulnerable among us—low-income Latinos and African Americans, children, renters—were most at risk, and documented initial scientific literature about the impacts of exposure to toxic chemicals from oil drilling. These early findings have now been supported by a large body of research as discussed in the next section.



STAND-L.A. activists participate in Martin Luther King Day Parade in South LA.

Coalition-building to expand and increase the strength that residents alone could bring to shift the political landscape. STAND-L.A. invested years in reaching out to neighborhood councils, environmental and public health groups, labor unions, faith groups, civil rights groups, climate advocates, and social justice organizations to build the broad-based support needed to challenge the prevailing narrative that oil drilling was both safe and necessary. By attending hundreds of meetings across the region to explain the issue and ask for formal support of the campaign, STAND-L.A. organizers and leaders assembled an impressive list of endorsers. Many of these diverse supporters signed letters and showed up regularly to provide public testimony at the countless hearings required by both the city and county's protracted policymaking process.

Legal expertise provided by some of the country's most well-known public interest law organizations assisted STAND-L.A. to navigate complex and risky decisions throughout the policymaking process. The Center for Biological Diversity, Communities for a Better Environment, and the Natural Resources Defense Council served as the STAND-L.A. legal committee and contributed the expertise of their brilliant lawyers and law student interns. Communities for a Better Environment's work also included building on

their proven model of combining community organizing with science and the law. Earthjustice and UCLA's Frank G. Wells Environmental Law Clinic also contributed to the effort by representing key stakeholders and contributing their legal expertise. Understanding zoning codes, land uses, amortization studies, and a tangled web of regulatory procedures was only made possible through this expert legal support, which is detailed in the legal section of this report.

Communications through robust earned media relations drove a compelling media narrative, always leading with the experiences of frontline residents who told their authentic stories of health symptoms, illnesses, and lost school and work days. From *Los Angeles Times* to *The New York Times*, from VICE News to CNN, and from NPR to KJLH (LA's largest Black radio station), STAND-L.A.'s communications team drove a steady drumbeat of news coverage. "Toxic tours" were organized to show elected leaders, regulators, health agency professionals, the news media, and funders the dangers of oil drilling up-close and personal. A sophisticated digital media strategy helped amplify STAND-L.A.'s message at key moments, taking aim at decision-makers who could vote to keep the campaign moving forward, or stall it for months at a time.

Inside-outside relationships that leveraged the grassroots power of STAND-L.A. with the institutional power held by government leaders and staff, proved crucial to success at every step. Very few legislative champions were to be found at the outset of STAND-L.A.'s advocacy, but enough to initiate the legislative process with a motion to study the problem in 2017. From there, with a persistent strategy of face-to-face meetings and visible public support, STAND-L.A. presented the evidence for ending urban oil drilling, and started to change hearts and minds. Relationship-building with agency staff also was fundamental as the campaign gained traction, drawing on the expertise of the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning and County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health, to ensure that policy details would be properly crafted.



Banner at community meeting

Multi-year funding has enabled STAND-L.A. to stay on course for the long haul. With the support of a core group of loyal foundation partners—including the 11th Hour Project, Marisla Foundation, Roy + Patricia Disney Family Foundation, M+T Fantastic Family Foundation, Erol Foundation, Patagonia, and generous individual donors, Liberty Hill has mobilized the resources for nearly 10 years to make this progress possible. Frontline residents have generously given thousands of hours to tell their stories and build the campaign. But it also has required day-to-day staffing provided by capable organizers, policy researchers, communications experts, public interest lawyers, and others to mount these multiple strategies needed to win. These stalwart funders undergirded this work.

The vision and voice of frontline residents will be unstoppable in the quest for safe, healthy and thriving communities.

Consensus-based decision-making has stood the test of time, even as it demanded more hours, listening, and negotiation between STAND-L.A. partners. Led by thoughtful and strategic staff at all of the member organizations, the coalition worked through a myriad of difficult and high-stakes decisions with mutual respect, growing trust, and an openness that enabled constructive and creative problem-solving. At moments, we struggled with how to honor and embrace our core principles of racial and social justice against the pressures of legislative urgency. This model, which vests decision-making power in the frontline groups on the steering committee, has upheld shared values, and maintained unity, while waging an effective and sophisticated campaign amidst powerbrokers, bureaucrats, and monied interests.

Our work is not yet finished.

With the power of persistence that has defined the STAND-L.A. coalition from its earliest days, the vision and voice of frontline residents will be unstoppable in the quest for safe, healthy, and thriving communities that benefit all Angelenos.



Artwork by Eric Junker courtesy of Patagonia.



The Geography and Health Consequences of Oil Drilling in Los Angeles: An Update on a Decade of Research

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In 2015, when we co-authored a chapter of Liberty Hill's *Drilling Down* report, oil extraction and production in Los Angeles were extensive—but had been ongoing for a century with limited discussion. While some data existed on the hazards from oil drilling, research from the past decade has since demonstrated that living near oil and gas development poses a range of health threats to communities. Thousands of studies have documented health harms, including worsened asthma, reduced lung function, adverse birth outcomes, and cancer¹.

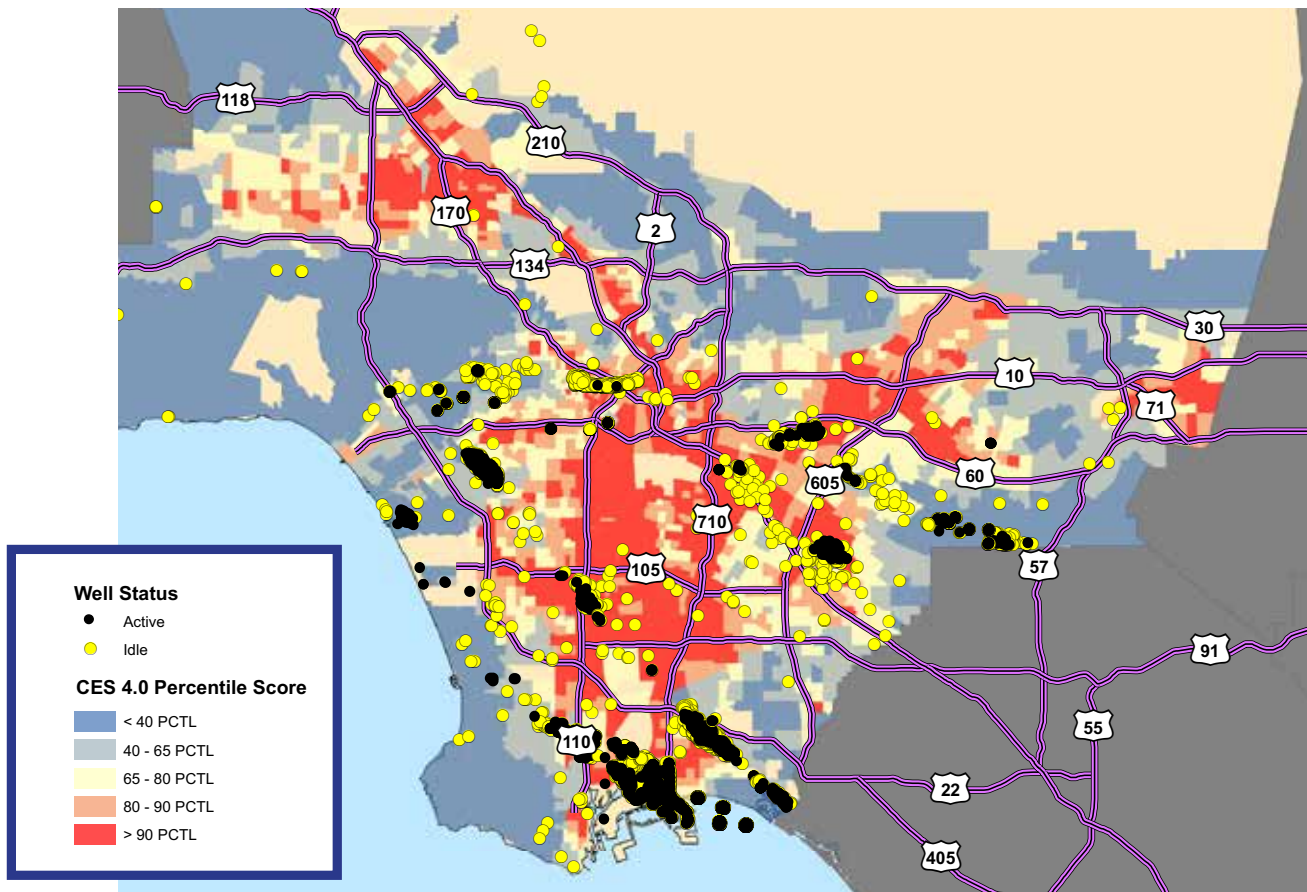
Los Angeles has the unique distinction as home to the largest concentration of oil production of any urban area in the nation, the legacy of its history as a center of petroleum production for more than a century. Oil drilling has structured land use and the built environment, and the county's nearly ten million residents live alongside many of the thousands of active wells that are interspersed in close proximity to everyday land uses. Residents can be exposed to hazardous chemicals from the full chain of petroleum drilling and production. In many low-income communities of color, numerous wells are uncovered, lack technological safeguards, and are much closer to homes, schools, churches, urban parks, playgrounds, and hospitals than in other parts of the city².

Today, the pattern of environmental injustice across Los Angeles persists. Even as city and county agencies have recognized the public health burden of oil drilling and committed to phase out oil drilling, the interim years pose ongoing and serious health concerns for frontline communities. Below, we first address the geography and demographic patterns of oil drilling in Los Angeles County and within the City of Los Angeles, followed by a brief review of the public health research on health impacts from oil and gas development over the past decade.

Oil Drilling and Cumulative Burdens in Los Angeles

Los Angeles County has a high proportion of communities that score in the higher percentiles of CalEnviroScreen (CES) 4.0, a method used by the State of California to characterize overall pollution burdens and population vulnerability at the census tract level³. These areas are typically referred to by the State of California as “environmental justice” communities due to their cumulative exposure to air toxins and environmental hazards from industrial and transportation land uses. In Figure 1, the map identifies numerous concentrations of active and idle oil wells in or near these areas, especially in South Los Angeles and the Harbor area.

Figure 1.



Active and idle oil and gas wells in southern Los Angeles County mapped with CES 4.0 percentile scores for census tracts. Wells tend to be concentrated in areas of high pollution burden and high social vulnerability. CES percentiles are relative to Los Angeles County alone.

Table 1. Active and idle oil wells, 2017 and 2022

Well Status	2017	2022
County of Los Angeles		
Active + New	5,801	3,890
Cancelled		202
Idle	1,281	3,475
Plugged	16,630	15,178
Buried	1,238	
TOTAL	24,950	22,745
City of Los Angeles*		
Active + New	600	590
Cancelled		33
Idle	1,347	1,347
Plugged	3,106	3,106
TOTAL	5,053	5,076

Status of onshore petroleum wells in LA County, 2017 and 2022, as reported to CalGEM⁵. Note: The total number of wells does not align primarily because CalGEM does not include wells in the Santa Clarita area in 2022. Data as of 10/1/2022.

*City of Los Angeles wells are included in the Los Angeles County well count

Active and Idle Oil Well Status

The overall trends in oil well activity⁴ between 2017 and 2022 offer a mixed picture, with LA County showing a significant decline (31.9%) in the number of active wells while the City of LA has only 10 fewer active wells (1.6%), as Table 1 indicates.

The number of idle wells—that is, wells that have not produced oil or gas recently but have not yet been properly plugged—has increased in LA County over the same five-year period. Within the City of Los Angeles, the number of idle wells remain unchanged over the same five-year period. Thousands of LA County wells are designated by the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) as plugged or buried. Threats to human health and the environment can be minimized through the proper abandoning, plugging, and decommissioning of wells.

Figure 2.



Active oil and gas wells in Los Angeles County (data from CalGEM January 2023).

Nearly all active wells in LA County cluster in patterns that largely correspond to their source oil fields. The number of wells in each cluster varies substantially, but these areas largely define the most impacted populations. THUMS (an acronym for the original oil field contractors Texaco, Humble, Union, Mobile, and Shell) Long Beach operates 30% of active wells countywide. Another half (51%) of the county’s active wells are operated by only five companies—Sentinel Peak Resources, Tidelands Oil, Signal Hill, Warren E&P, and E&B Natural Resources (Table 3). Most active wells in the City of LA (54%) are operated by two of those companies: Warren E&P, Inc, a Wyoming-based oil and gas exploration services company locally headquartered in Long Beach, and E&B Natural Resources Management Corporation, an independent oil and gas company headquartered in Bakersfield (Table 2).

Table 2. Active oil and gas wells within the City of LA, by operator

Operator Name	OG Wells
Warren E&P, Inc.	128
E&B Natural Resources Mgt Corp	117
Tidelands Oil Production Co.	66
Pacific Coast Energy Company LP	36
Cooper & Brain, Inc.	20
Brea Canon Oil Co.	19
Hillcrest Beverly Oil Corp.	16
O’Donnell Oil, LLC	10

Only operators with 10 or more wells are listed; 39 additional wells in small clusters are not listed.

Table 3. Active oil and gas wells within Los Angeles County by operator

Operator Name	OG Wells
THUMS Long Beach Co.	1158
Sentinel Peak Resources California LLC	731
Tidelands Oil Production Co.	616
Signal Hill Petroleum, Inc.	231
Warren E&P, Inc.	195
E&B Natural Resources Mgmt. Corp.	193
WG Holdings SPV, LLC	175
Matrix Oil Corporation	111
Brea Canon Oil Co.	56
California Resources Long Beach, Inc.	55
Southern California Gas Company	45
Pacific Coast Energy Company LP	43
Synergy Oil & Gas, LLC	43
Cooper & Brain, Inc.	28
Hillcrest Beverly Oil Corp.	18
E&T Limited Liability Co.	16
The Termo Company	16
Bridge Energy LLC	13
S&C Oil Co., Inc.	13
P&M Oil Company, Inc.	11
O'Donnell Oil, LLC	10

Only operators with 10 or more wells are listed; 90 additional wells are operated by smaller companies.

Idle oil wells constitute a growing problem in the Los Angeles region, and across California. CalGEM reports that more than 35,000 wells currently are categorized as idle statewide; that total encompasses 3,475 in the County of LA, including 1,347 idle wells within the City of LA (Table 1) as of 2022. CalGEM regulates idle wells and requires that they must be plugged if they have been inactive for 24 months. A similar City of LA code requires plugging if a well sits idle for twelve months and charges the fire department with enforcement.

In spite of these State of California and City of Los Angeles regulations, the same number of idle wells found in the City of LA in 2017 remained idle in 2022, according to CalGEM reporting, and those wells have not been plugged during this five-year interval (Table 1). As highlighted by the report section below on the Murphy drill site in South LA, it is crucial to regulate wells that remain idle long past their regulatory allowance, and to require proper clean-up and remediation of the soil where wells operated.

To investigate the extent of this problem, we used the API (American Petroleum Institute) identifier number to uniquely identify the specific wells within the boundary of the City of LA that are reported as idle in 2022, to determine their 2017 CalGEM status. Nearly one-third (427) of the idle 1,347 wells in the City of Los Angeles are operated by the eight companies listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Operators and well count of idle wells located within the City of LA that have remained idle since 2017.

Operator	Number of Idle Wells
Warren E&P, Inc.	93
L.A. Terminal & Transport Co.	62
Westlake Oil Co.	54
E&B Natural Resources Management Corp	47
Union Consolidated Crude Oil Co.	47
C.C. Harris Oil Co.	43
Parker Oil Col	41
Tidelands Oil Production Co.	40
TOTAL	427

Oil Drilling, Proximity, and Environmental Justice Disparities

Los Angeles City and County have voted to prohibit all new oil and gas drilling and to phase out current extraction. Both jurisdictions are concurrently conducting amortization studies to determine the phase-out timetable. Residents will continue to be exposed to harmful chemicals and emissions, especially those who live closer to oil and gas wells and production facilities, during the phase-out period.

A significant portion of Los Angeles oil activity takes place near homes, schools, and other sensitive land uses. Los Angeles has recognized the public health consequences of drilling nearby a large population by declaring oil drilling a nonconforming land use. In addition, a California state law (S.B. 1137) enacted in September 2022 prohibits new wells within 3,200 feet of residences, schools, nursing homes and other sensitive land uses, and requires stronger regulatory standards and protections for existing wells inside the buffer. Here, we use the 3,200-foot buffer not as a protective distance because public health research⁶ has demonstrated health burdens farther away than 1 kilometer (~3,200 feet) from active oil and gas activity, but to help visualize proximity of wells to sensitive sites in environmental justice communities.

When compared across the county, several communities in Los Angeles near oil drilling operations demonstrate clear racial and income disparities. A number of neighborhoods in the community of Wilmington, the large area adjacent to the Inglewood Oil Field, and the Murphy drill site in South LA, are all significantly threatened by hazards from oil drilling.

Table 5. Race and income statistics for EJ communities near oil drilling: 2020 Census

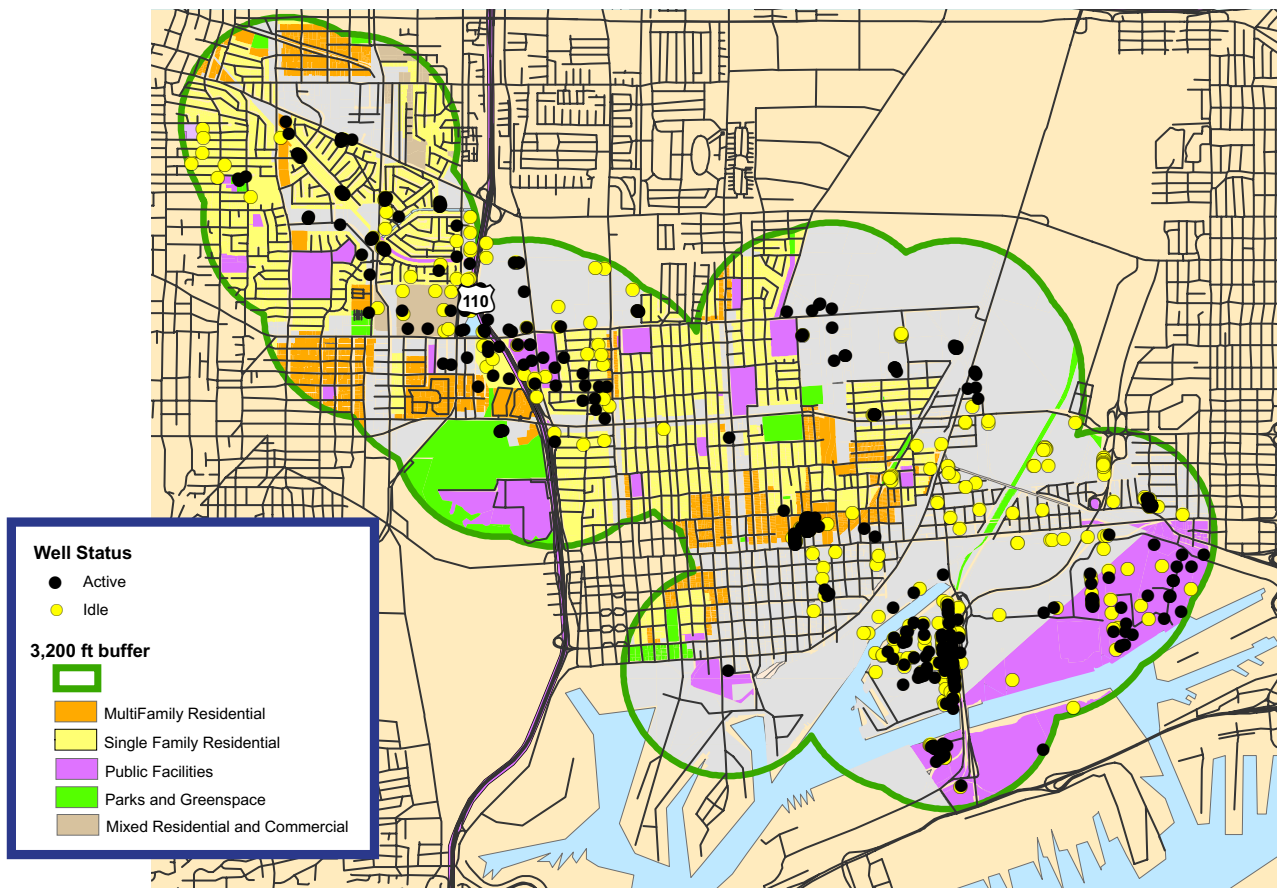
	Percent people of color	Aggregate median household income
Wilmington	92.6%	\$39,142
Inglewood	73.2%	\$47,830
South LA (Murphy drill site)	95.5%	\$21,955
LA County	74.2%	\$66,689

Wilmington, with the largest concentration (61%) of active wells in all of the City of LA, also hosts a large population and many sensitive land uses in close proximity. Distances separating some of these wells from communities are among the closest in Los Angeles. For example, over half (51% or 430/840) of these wells are located within 200 meters (~650 feet) of residential land, and nearly two thirds (64% or 538/840) of these wells are located within 3,200 feet of residential land, with residential land use comprising 42% of this area.

This area is also the nexus of some of the highest CalEnviroScreen cumulative environmental burden and population vulnerability scores in the entire state.

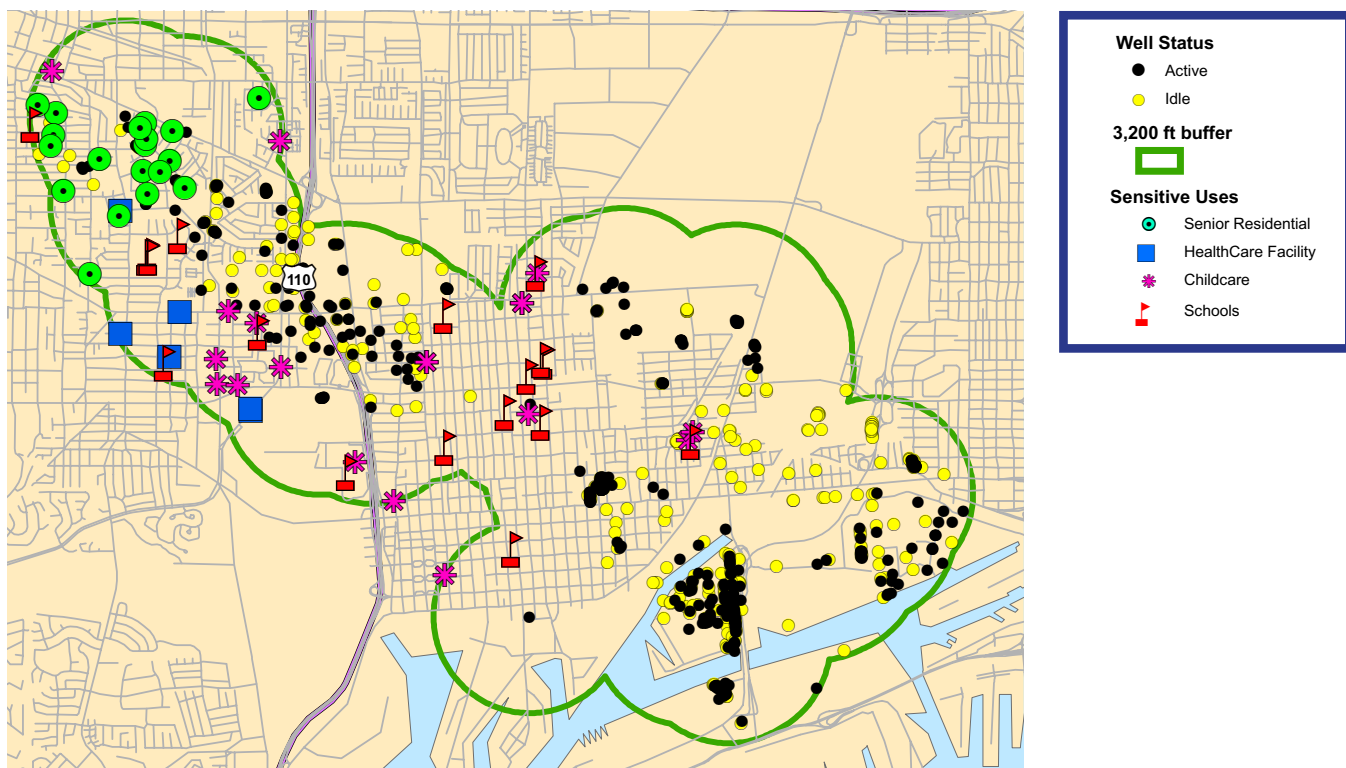
Figure 3 shows current sensitive land use designations—single and multi-family homes, public facilities, parks, and schools. Similarly, there are a large number of sensitive “receptors”—including senior residential facilities, health care establishments, schools, and childcare centers—residing in close proximity to active oil drilling (Figure 4).

Figure 3.



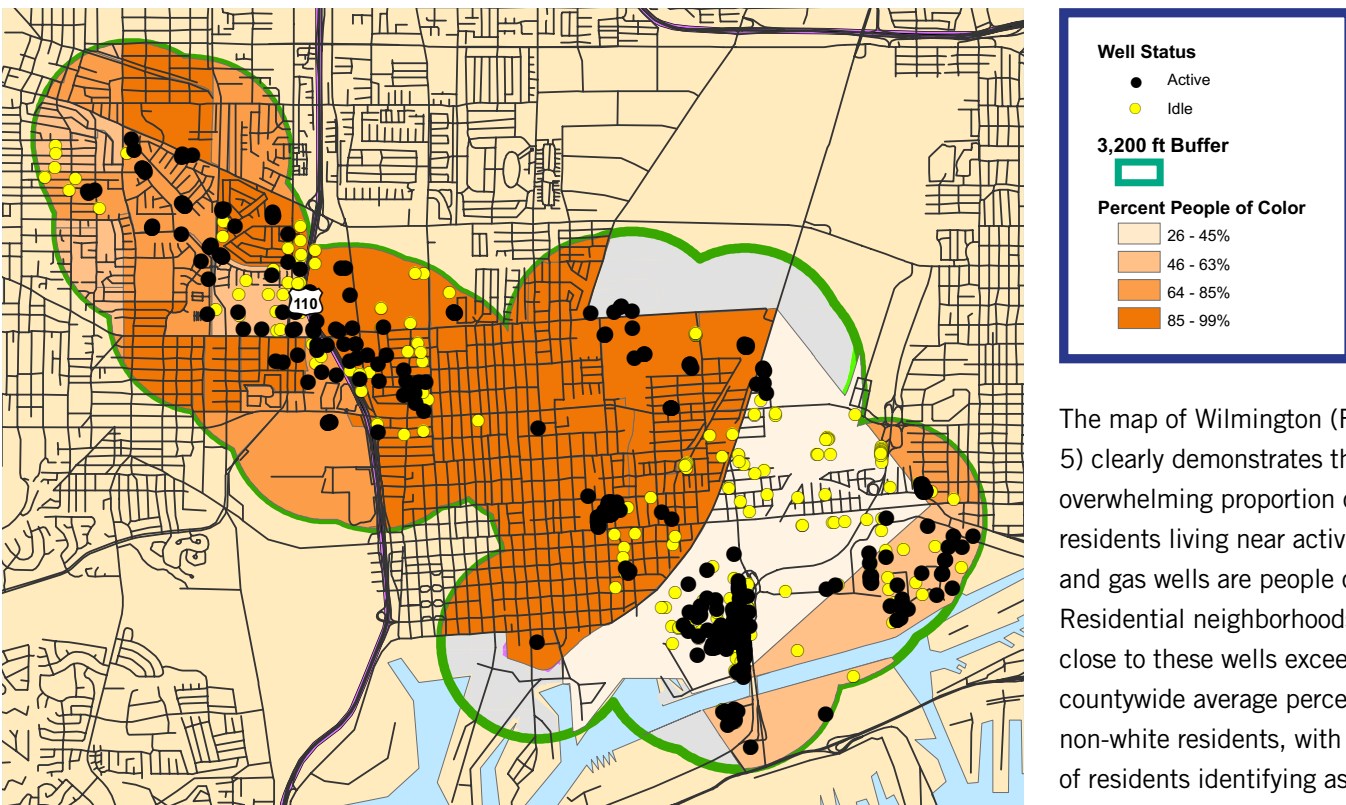
Map of the Wilmington area and sensitive land uses within the 3,200-foot buffer distance. Sensitive uses are defined by the California Air Resources Board⁷.

Figure 4.



Map of the Wilmington area and sensitive land uses within a 3,200-foot buffer distance. Sensitive uses are defined by the California Air Resources Board⁸.

Figure 5.



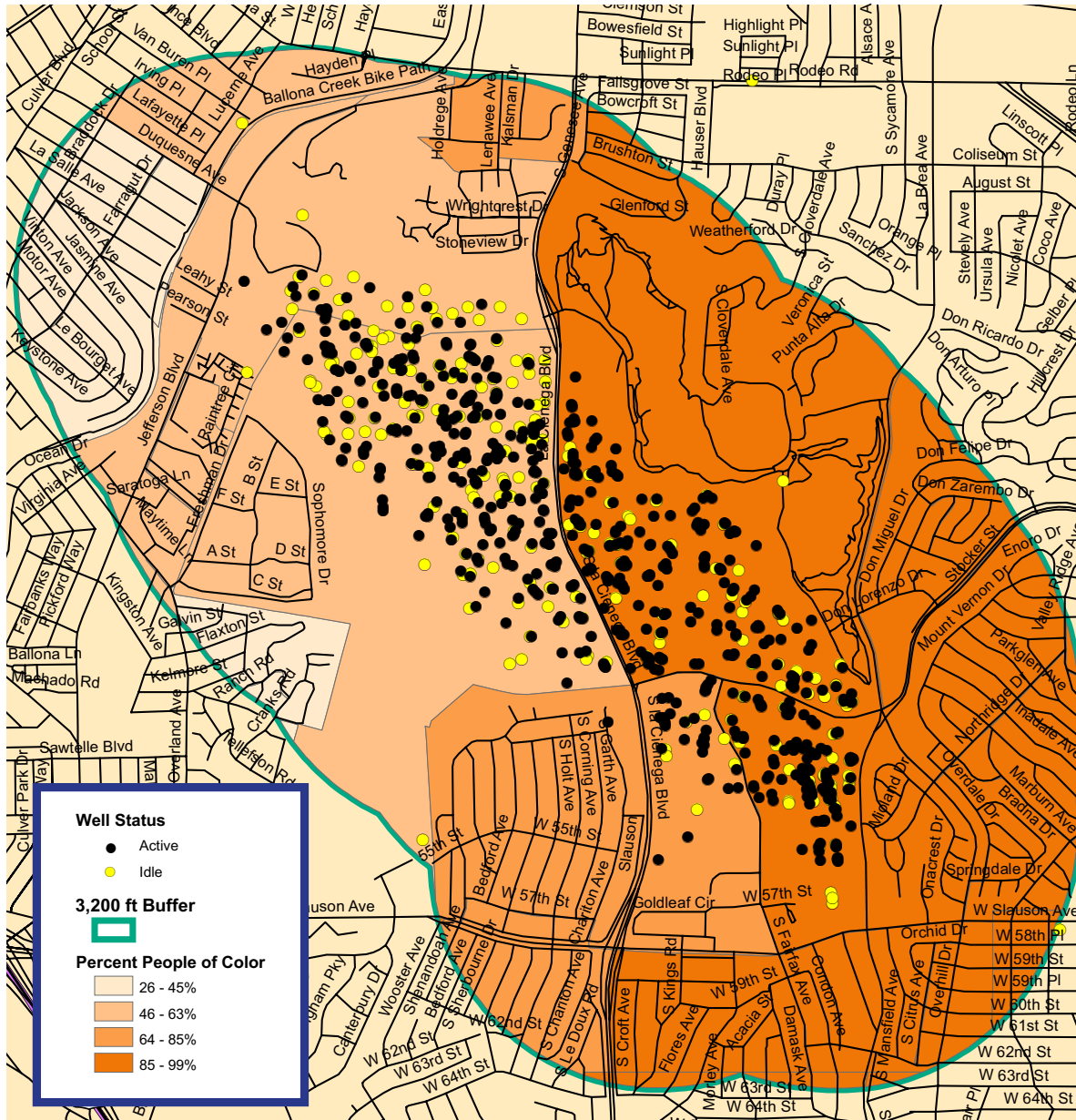
Map of the Wilmington area shows a high proportion of residents who are people of color living within a 3,200-foot buffer distance from active wells.

The map of Wilmington (Figure 5) clearly demonstrates that an overwhelming proportion of the residents living near active oil and gas wells are people of color. Residential neighborhoods located close to these wells exceed the countywide average percentage of non-white residents, with 85-99% of residents identifying as people of color.

The Inglewood Oil Field is the largest urban oil field in the nation, and primarily under the jurisdiction of the County of LA, where oil drilling activities are governed by the Baldwin Hills Community Standards District, a separate zone in the planning code. This area is surrounded by the communities of Baldwin Hills, Inglewood, Culver City, the City of LA, and unincorporated parts of LA County. Figure 6 shows that within a large area to the east and south of the oil field, residential occupants constitute the

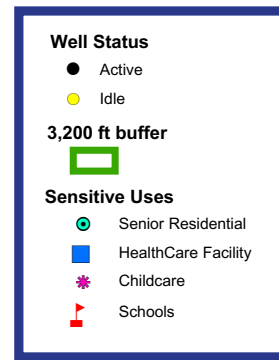
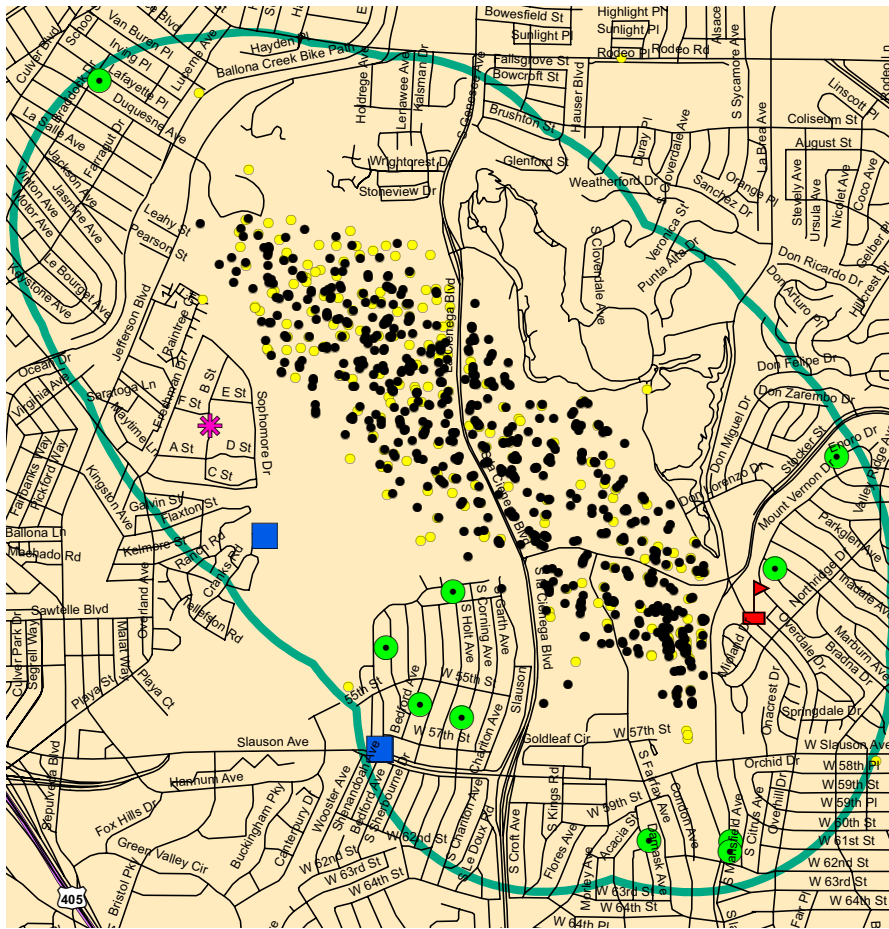
unincorporated county's highest proportion of people of color (>85%). Figure 7 shows sensitive land use locations, including senior residential, health care, childcare facilities and schools, within the proximity buffer surrounding the active oil field. In the southeastern part of the field, residences and Windsor Hills Elementary School are in close proximity to numerous active oil wells. This is also the area near the Inglewood Oil Field with the highest proportion of people of color (Figure 6).

Figure 6.



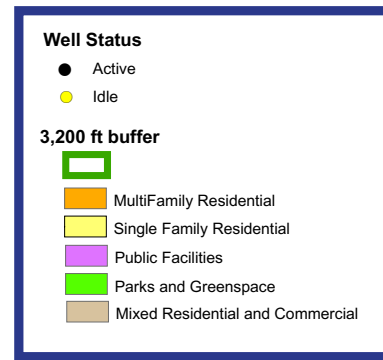
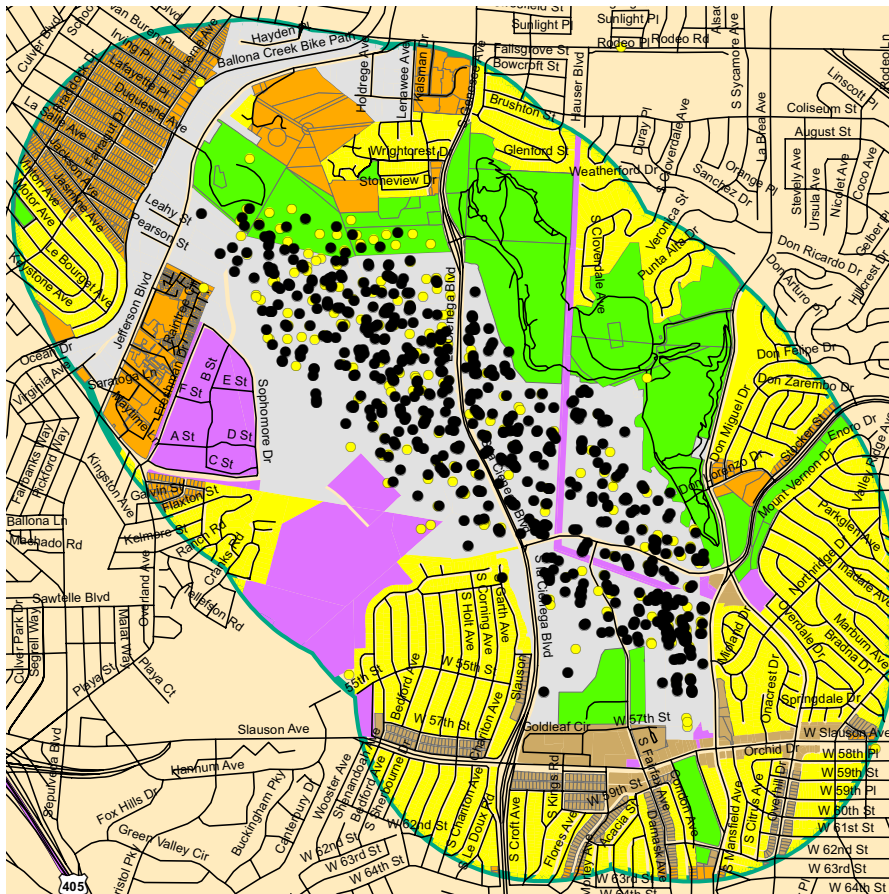
The Inglewood Oil field with a 3,200-foot buffer around active wells shows a high proportion of residents who are people of color.

Figure 7.



Inglewood Oil Field with a 3,200-foot buffer around active wells. Sensitive land use locations, including senior residential, health care, childcare facilities and schools are shown within the proximity buffer to the active oil field.

Figure 8.

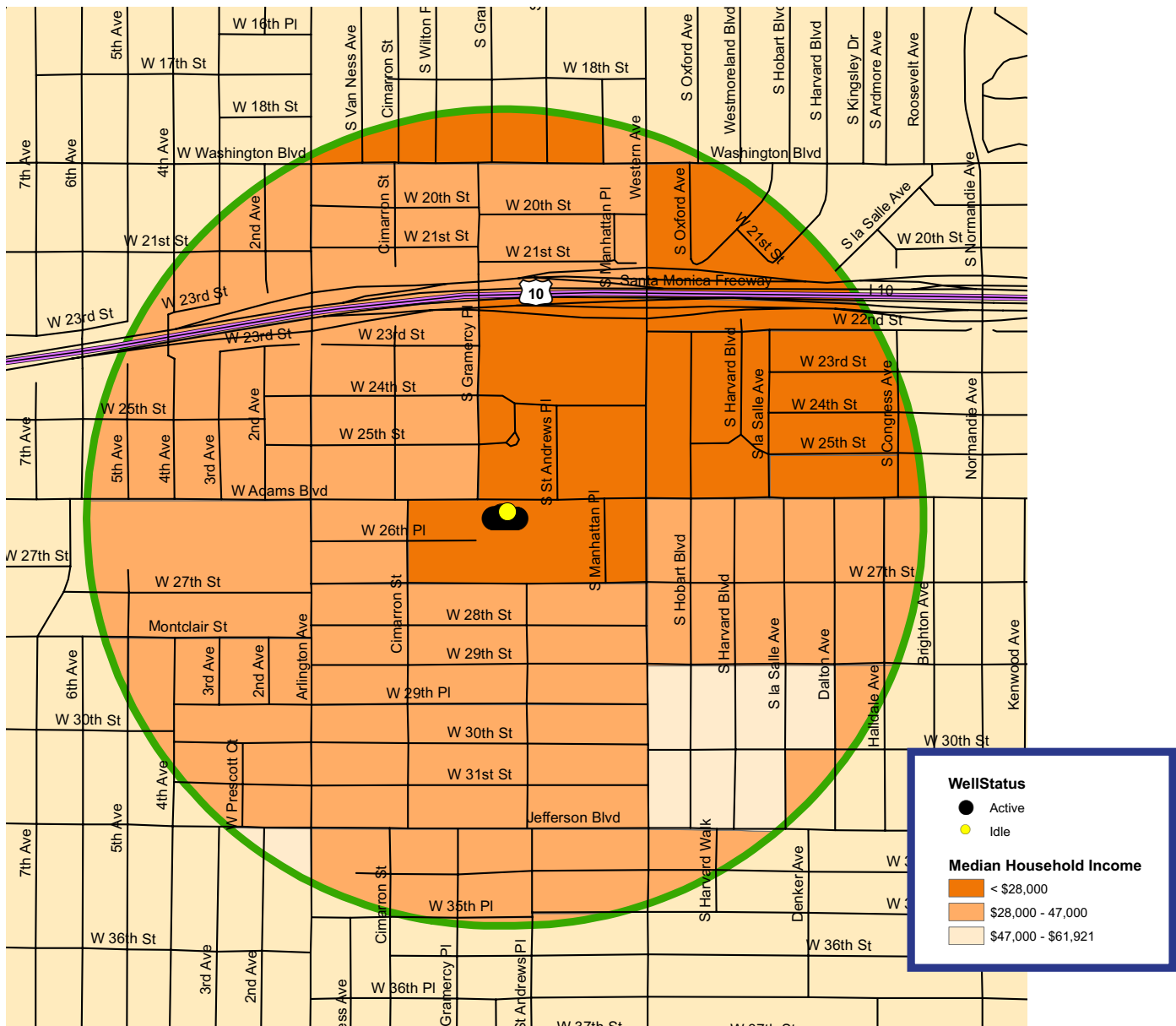


Sensitive land uses located within a 3,200-foot buffer around active and idle wells in the Inglewood Oil Field.

The Murphy drill site located in the historic West Adams neighborhood of South Los Angeles shows similar patterns of racial and economic disparity. Table 5 shows that 95.5% of residents are people of color, compared to an average of 74.2% in LA County. Figure 9 shows that households near the Murphy drill site are predominantly low income, especially to the northeast, at levels far lower than average for Los Angeles County. In Figure 10, we

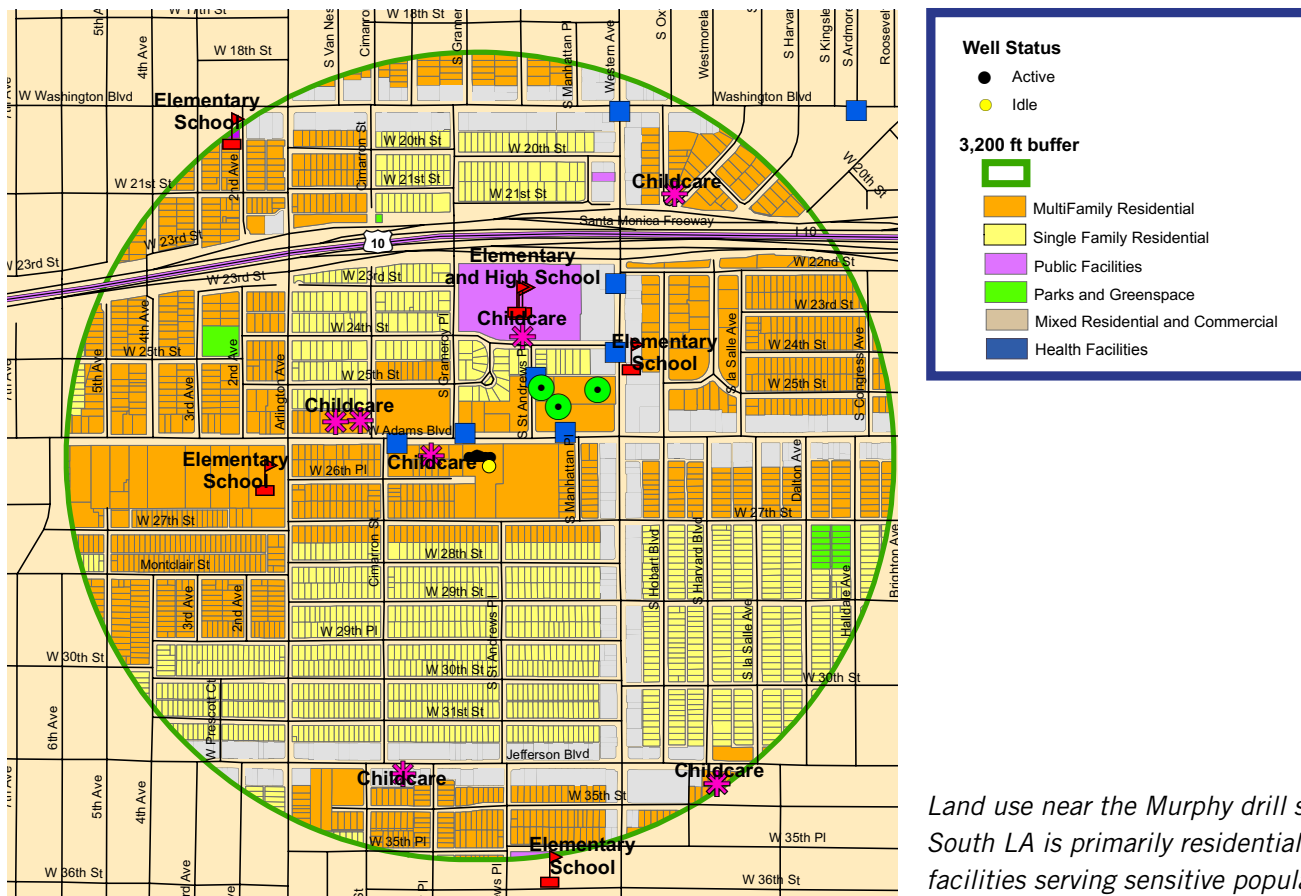
show both sensitive land uses and sensitive sites within 3,200 feet of the Murphy drill site. The sensitive sites on the map are those defined by the California Air Resources Board, including schools and child care centers. The community also has many facilities serving sensitive populations including a medical center, a pediatric audiology clinic, a preschool, a convalescent hospital, senior housing, and a nursing home.

Figure 9.



Murphy drill site in South LA and annual median household income at the census block group level (2020).

Figure 10.



Land use near the Murphy drill site in South LA is primarily residential, with many facilities serving sensitive populations.

Health Impacts of Oil Drilling: Takeaways and Updates From 10+ Years of Research

Oil and gas wells impact neighboring Los Angeles communities, from production, extraction, construction, and maintenance of the production facilities, onsite product processing, the use of water-flood and other secondary recovery technologies, contaminated water disposal, spills both large and small, onsite chemical storage, and transportation truck traffic to and from the drilling site, or the operation of diesel equipment.

The oil extraction process produces gaseous emissions of multiple health-hazardous air pollutants, including particulate matter (PM), nitric oxides (NOx), polyaromatic hydrocarbons, benzene, naphthalene, xylenes, toluene, ethylbenzene, formaldehyde, and sulfuric acid. Many of these compounds are known to be toxic to human health, irritate the lungs or skin, are carcinogenic, cause respiratory harm, or are endocrine-disrupting chemicals that can cause long-term developmental or reproductive harm. These chemicals can migrate off-site as fugitive emissions, spills, leaks, or accidents⁹. Areas near oil and gas production are particularly vulnerable to elevated concentrations of toxic air emissions¹⁰.

Studies over the past decade show that communities living near oil and gas extraction facilities face a range of adverse health consequences. Health studies of residents living near petroleum extraction sites report throat and nasal irritation, eye burning, sinus problems, headaches, skin problems, severe fatigue, loss of smell, coughing, nosebleeds, respiratory harm, psychological stress¹¹, and higher cancer mortality in communities exposed to oil extraction, including increased diagnoses of children with leukemia^{12,13}. Adverse impacts during pregnancy make up the strongest body of evidence. Living in close proximity to active oil and gas extraction during pregnancy can impact a fetus' development¹⁴. Worsened birth outcomes include preterm birth, low birth weight, and small for gestational age births, which can also carry health consequences through adulthood¹⁵.

In 2021, a scientific panel convened by CalGEM concluded, “the totality of the epidemiological evidence provides a high level of certainty that exposure to OGD (oil and gas development) causes a significant increased risk of poor birth outcomes. The panel also found a high level of certainty that living near oil and gas development is associated with poor respiratory outcomes ¹⁶.”

Idle, abandoned, or orphaned oil and gas wells can also pose environmental and health hazards. Unplugged wells or improperly decommissioned wells can harm human health through the emissions of air toxins such as benzene or hydrogen sulfide¹⁷, as well as greenhouse gases such as methane¹⁸. Locally, the degradation of the cement and steel that make up a wellbore can lead to migration of gases or fluids that may contaminate surface water or groundwater, and in some cases, accumulations of gases can lead to explosion risks.

Community-Academic Partnerships Revealed Oil Extraction Harms Respiratory Health in Los Angeles Communities

In 2015, we created a community-academic partnership to conduct research with frontline residents and published the first LA-based research. In response to the AllenCo site in University Park ramping up production more than 400% in one year, we worked alongside community health workers (*promotoras de salud*), Esperanza Community Housing/People Not Pozos, and Redeemer Community Partnership to conduct door-to-door surveys (813 neighbors from 203 households) in the West Adams and University Park neighborhoods. We found that the residents living near active oil wells were more likely to report asthma

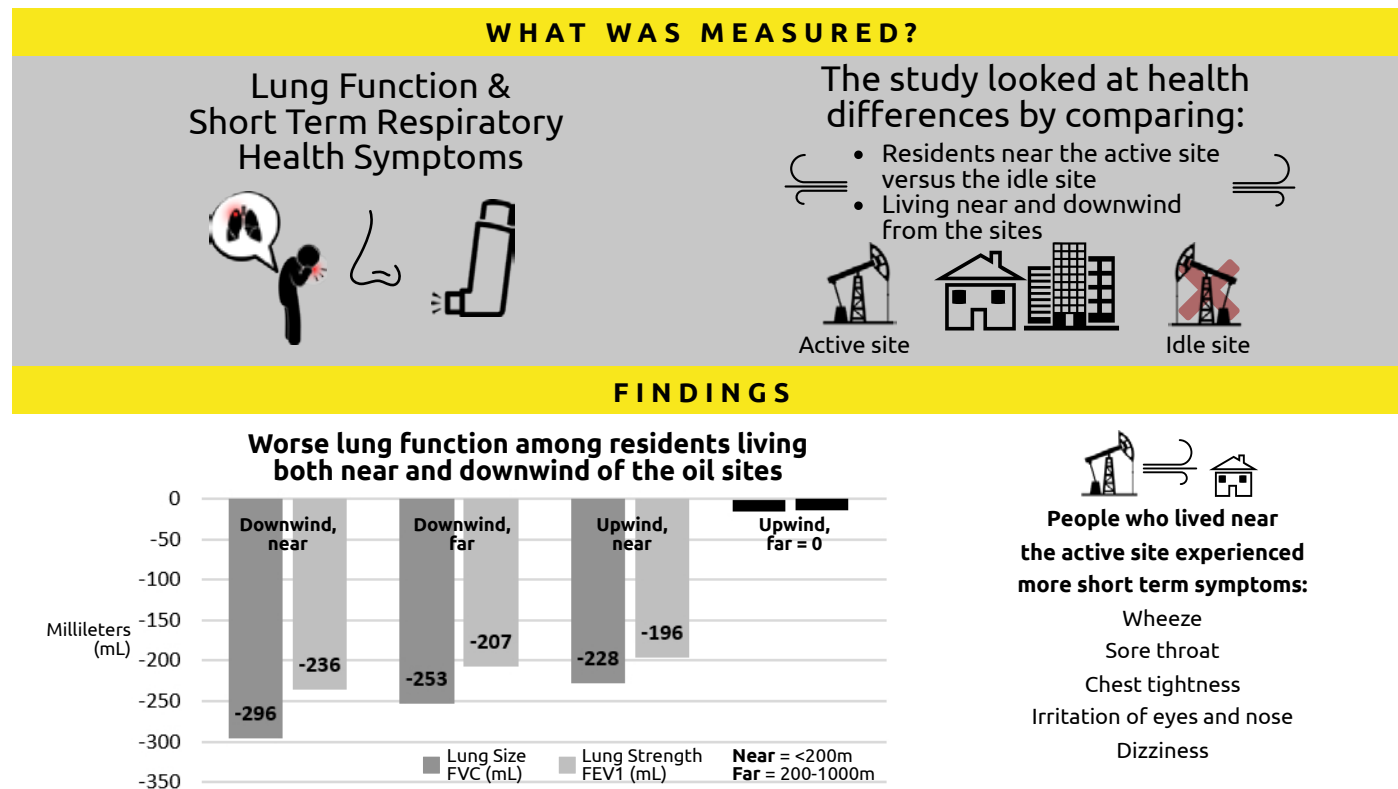
diagnoses compared to Los Angeles County as a whole. We learned that many residents were unaware they lived near active oil drilling (45%), and a majority did not know how to contact local regulatory authorities to report odors or environmental hazards (63%)¹⁹.

In the following years, we conducted the first epidemiological study in which we measured lung function in 747 long-term residents living near the Murphy and AllenCo sites. Poor lung function is a predictor of health problems, including respiratory disease, death from cardiovascular problems, and early death in general²⁰.

Our 2021 study documented *decreased lung function for residents who lived near the active Murphy Drill Site and even the recently idled AllenCo operation in South Los Angeles*. The closer someone lives to an active or recently idled well site, the poorer the person's lung function, even after adjusting for other risk factors, such as smoking, asthma, and proximity to a freeway. Living near an oil well worsened lung health. On average, the impact on residents' lungs is worse than living beside a highway or being exposed to secondhand smoke every day.

This research is cited in the Los Angeles County motion to phase out oil extraction in county jurisdictions²¹.

Figure 11.



[Respiratory health near urban oil development.](#)²²

Nearly ten years of health research has drawn a clear conclusion that oil wells are incompatible with healthy communities. While the City and County of Los Angeles work toward a future without oil extraction, the public health evidence shows that action is needed on the following:

1. While the City and County determine the appropriate phaseout timeline, regulatory agencies must enforce the strongest possible health protections for residential communities near wells. Low-income residents and residents of color face a multitude of health impacts and exposures to environmental hazards. Drilling in areas such as South LA and Wilmington is often done with diesel rigs that emit toxic fumes and noise pollution, while many of the oil sites in predominantly affluent and whiter neighborhoods in the city utilize electric equipment and soundproofing²³. Health protections that should be implemented in the near term include electrification and site enclosures, such as barrier walls to limit the spread of toxic chemicals and noise from the site to the neighborhood, and the cessation of diesel truck use²⁴.

2. Communities need clear plans and standards for decommissioning, remediation, and redevelopment. CalGEM oversees the decommissioning of oil wells while the Department of Toxic Substances Control and the California State Water Resources Control Board handles site remediation to ensure that soil and groundwater are not contaminated and the site can be safely redeveloped. However, when oil fields are not properly decommissioned and lack a clear and thorough remediation plan, these parcels can become brownfields, which pose large costs and liability to communities, cities, and the state²⁵.

3. The City and County of Los Angeles should prepare for the process of decommissioning and remediating the many sites within their jurisdictions, including idle wells, that require closure under the new phaseout ordinance. At the state level, oil operators must either write and implement an Idle Well Management Plan in which they detail how they will close a small fraction of the long-term idle wells on their site(s) each year or pay an idle well fee and forgo the Management Plan²⁶. This system allows operators to pay each year for their idle wells without committing to closing the wells within a certain time frame. CalGEM must rethink this process because it does not incentivize operators to properly plug and abandon (decommission) idle wells. The inclusion and enforcement of a “polluter pays” principle under which the oil operator is responsible for funding site cleanup and

ensuring remediation to the highest standard are additional examples of pathways for prioritizing community health.

4. Once the sites are properly cleaned up, it is critical for the City and County of Los Angeles to prioritize community-centered land uses to support the frontline communities that have been most impacted by oil drilling within their jurisdictions. The respective government agencies should incorporate strategies for engaging with residents in the interim and during phaseout, including data transparency and community oversight around phaseout and closure processes. Community residents should have a say in the future of current oil extraction sites in their neighborhoods that have long posed a health and safety risk.

Reader Guide to Understanding Oil and Gas Well Data

Data on oil wells across California is available from the California Geologic Energy Management Division’s (CalGEM) online data portal. CalGEM maintains and publicly distributes records for each well and classifies them using “well status” codes. These codes are different for the 2017 CalGEM data as compared to 2022, so this analysis has aggregated them to a small number of status conditions to facilitate comparison (Table 1).

The definitions of different “well status” as defined by CalGEM are below:

Table 6. Well status as defined by CalGEM²⁷

Well Status	Definition (in California)
Active	A well that is drilled, completed, and in use.
New	A well that was recently permitted, but not yet drilled or completed.
Canceled	A well for which the well permit was canceled prior to drilling.
Idle	A well that has not been used for two years or more, and has not had a proper plugging and abandonment process.
Plugged	A well that has been plugged (sealed) and has not gone through the abandonment process.
Plugged and abandoned	A well that is permanently sealed and closed in compliance with standards.
Orphaned ²⁸	A well for which no responsible, solvent operator remains to maintain, repair, or plug and abandon it.
Buried	A well that is buried and idle.

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A Community on a Mission to Heal Itself: People Not Pozos and The Allenco Drill Site

Nalleli Cobo speaking at a rally outside of Los Angeles City Hall, joined by AllenCo residents and STAND-L.A. leaders.

By Nancy Halpern Ibrahim, Rabeya Sen and Hugo Garcia, Esperanza Community Housing

The story of the community living around the AllenCo Energy, Inc. oil drilling site is the story of a neighborhood striving to heal itself – and consequently sparking a citywide movement for environmental justice.

In 2010, residents living in the University Park neighborhood of Los Angeles began smelling strong unpleasant odors and experiencing health issues: spontaneous nosebleeds, chronic headaches, as well as more frequent asthma attacks, including first-time asthma episodes.

Initially, we organized a call-in campaign to report complaints and concerns. Despite over 352 acknowledged calls from neighbors to the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) about the noxious odors, regulators did not take action.

Community members continued to report symptoms of ill health. Due to SCAQMD’s inaction, residents rapidly realized that they, along with our team at Esperanza Community Housing, a mission-led affordable housing developer dedicated to social and environmental justice, had to find our own answers.

Under the name “People Not Pozos”—Spanish for “people not oil wells”—we began investigating through door-to-door

organizing and education, inviting residents to participate in a health impact study. Our investigations led us to discover that a set of bland and unremarkable gates in the neighborhood disguised an oil drilling facility owned by AllenCo Energy, Inc. Having recently increased production of oil at the site by 400 percent, the site was producing toxic emissions that were making neighbors sick.



Residents demonstrating against AllenCo outside the Los Angeles Archdiocese.



Nancy Ibrahim and residents at the Alegria Apartments, located across the street from AllenCo, at the launch of their rooftop solar panels.

Despite this, the SCAQMD would not disclose any information about the chemicals used by AllenCo. We also discovered that the City of Los Angeles' position of Petroleum Administrator, which should have provided oversight of oil companies, had remained vacant for nearly 40 years. In 2013, People Not Pozos held a press conference at Esperanza's Alegria Apartments, across from the AllenCo site, to demand accountability from the oil company and all regulatory agencies.

Responding to coverage in the *Los Angeles Times*, Environmental Protection Agency investigators finally came to inspect the site and felt sick themselves. The site was temporarily shut down, spurring health conditions to improve.

However, residents were determined to make sure the site would never reopen and again threaten their health and livelihoods. Under the People Not Pozos campaign, they continued to work door-to-door to educate and engage neighbors on the health impacts of the site.

They sent letters to the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, urging the Church to stop leasing the land to AllenCo and follow the environmental teachings of Pope Francis' *Laudato si'*. They staged an action outside of the Archdiocese's headquarters.

Esperanza Community Housing installed a solar panel array on top of the Alegria apartments, recognizing that clean and renewable energy must be prioritized for communities suffering at the frontlines of fossil fuel pollution.

In 2014, when the enactment of SCAQMD's Rule 1148.2 finally required oil companies to disclose the chemicals they use, People Not Pozos learned that the health symptoms documented by their investigation corresponded exactly to predictable, known risks of chemicals used by AllenCo. People Not Pozos established that neighborhood drilling was not only a regulatory problem, but also a significant threat to public health.

All the while, the story of People Not Pozos organizers and residents led other Los Angeles communities, public health groups, and environmental justice organizations to come together. They realized collectively that oil pollution was not an isolated problem, but instead a systemic one. Perpetuated by discriminatory planning and zoning policies that concentrated polluting and harmful industrial uses in low-income communities of color, neighborhood oil drilling endangers Angelenos from South L.A. to Wilmington.



Residents and community leaders staffing a community event at the Alegria Apartments.

Community groups working in these neighborhoods came together to form Stand Together Against Neighborhood Drilling (STAND-L.A.). United, we coordinated actions around the City, including at AllenCo, the Archdiocese and City Hall.



Model heads showing the symptoms caused by chemicals used in oil extraction to demonstrate health impacts to residents.

Finally, after years of persistence, Esperanza and our partners began to see momentum. In March 2019, then-mayor of Los Angeles Eric Garcetti announced the City was terminating its own lease agreement with AllenCo. In 2020, state regulators ordered AllenCo to plug and decommission its wells to permanently close the facility.

Despite all of these regulatory and legal actions, residents are still waiting for relief and protection. The oil industry is constantly forcing frontline communities to choose between their housing or their health. Unfortunately, that choice is reinforced by a long legacy of racist planning and zoning policies that continue to put residents at risk.

As the COVID-19 pandemic devastated our community and made us all more conscious of the importance of public health, AllenCo used it as an opportunity to delay. Instead of facing the music, they appealed the order to decommission in 2020.

In 2021, news reports warned that pressure inside the 21 AllenCo wells was “building every day” since being shut off in 2013, raising the risk of dangerous leaks. In early 2022, state inspectors who had been denied an inspection by AllenCo for months, accompanied by law enforcement officers, were forced to use a warrant, a locksmith and bolt cutters to break into the site for inspection.

Today, one of the main concerns for residents is making sure the oil wells, which are now idle, are properly maintained and depressurized to prevent any leaks into the community. We need to see clear regulations that define oil well remediation and practices to do so, as well as hold AllenCo and other polluters financially accountable for cleanup.

Once the site is thoroughly and properly remediated, Esperanza and People Not Pozos also want to see the Archdiocese and the City make the site permanently available for redevelopment by the community, for the community. From our conversations at neighborhood meetings, residents want to see more affordable housing with parking, a neighborhood cooling center, more community space, and more green space.

It’s not enough to talk about shutting down an oil well or even phasing out oil drilling citywide. We must go beyond the mindset of extraction and exploitation to ensure a true just transition that heals the land, our health, our relationships with each other, and our political systems.



Since beginning her activism at age 9 while living near the AllenCo oil drilling site, the power and persistence of Nalleli Cobo (now age 21) has received international acclaim. Nalleli, featured in the original Drilling Down report alongside her mother Monica Uriarte, has continued to speak up for environmental justice in Los Angeles. In 2022, she was awarded the Goldman Prize and included in TIME's 100 Next list of upcoming leaders.



From Drilling to Dreaming: A South LA Neighborhood Realizes its Vision for a Post-Fossil Fuel Future

Richard Parks of Redeemer Community Partnership leading a round of chants at a community protest outside the Jefferson Drill Site.

By Richard Parks, Redeemer Community Partnership

In August 2018, we received unexpected news: oil company Sentinel Peak Resources had decided to close the Jefferson drill site. They did not come to this decision charitably, but rather as a result of five years of the community demanding better.

We began organizing in the vicinity of the Jefferson drill site in our South Los Angeles neighborhood in 2013. The oil company had just asked the City of Los Angeles for permits to drill three new oil wells.

We knocked on doors around the drill site asking neighbors how it affected them and making sure they knew about the upcoming public hearing. No one knew about the expansion proposal, because the oil company had not sent out notices as required—but residents all had disturbing stories about their bad neighbor: Sonny shared how keeping his windows closed could not keep diesel exhaust and petroleum fumes out of his 2-year old daughter’s bedroom. Oscar shared how the deafening din of thousands of feet of metal pipe driven into wells had robbed him of the peaceful enjoyment of his home. Dolores shared photos of oil company workers painting curbs red, creating fake “no parking” zones where

residents received parking tickets. Ms. QC shared how she was sprayed with oil from the nearby facility as she watered her front lawn.

As we spoke with neighbors, we also began to recognize disturbing patterns in health effects. Headaches and nosebleeds were pervasive. So too were miscarriages.

We started identifying the chemicals that were delivered to the site weekly and researching their health effects. We found that many of them contained endocrine disruptors, powerful chemicals that damage reproductive health. One chilling label read, “DANGER: damages fertility and the unborn child.”

We had experience using the City’s nuisance abatement process to close problematic liquor stores. Could the same land use strategy succeed in closing a nuisance oil company with a market capitalization of \$35 billion? We decided to find out.

We started sharing with our neighbors what we were learning about chemical use, violations, regulatory failure,



Residents protesting outside the Jefferson Drill Site to demand health and safety protections.

and how to recognize and report violations. Neighbors hosted cameras in their homes so that we could closely monitor activities at the drill site and then go to the facility to photograph violations. We taught residents how to report petroleum odors to 800-CUT-SMOG and request that South Coast Air Quality Management District inspectors bring monitoring equipment, because otherwise they would not.

We observed that the oil company used a highly toxic extraction process called acidization. Strong acids are pumped down wells to dissolve the bedrock and create new pathways to bring oil to the surface.

On numerous occasions, we saw up to four tanker trucks onsite, each holding 5,000 gallons of toxic, carcinogenic, endocrine-disrupting chemicals parked 10 feet from bedroom windows. Workers on the drill site wore head-to-toe protection and stood behind red DANGER tape. A few feet away, families had no warning of what was happening next door. Once, the acid fumes were so intense, they killed the plants outside the drill site on the downwind corner.

We also photographed the oil company spraying odorants into the air. The jasmine-scented chemicals mask the

presence of toxic and explosive hydrogen sulfide gas with endocrine-disrupting chemicals that imperil the reproductive health of our community.

The oil company's disregard for our children and community was made clear by one of the oil company executives. In our first meeting he said, "Let's face it, we're not talking about the Ritz-Carlton at Laguna Niguel now are we?" His perspective was that our South LA neighborhood was a sacrifice zone.

The City often helped the company. When homes were demolished to make way for the drill site, the oil company left two homes and two additional parcels vacant as a buffer. Later, the oil company came to the City with a plan to redevelop the parcels into dense, multi-family housing. They would place a deed restriction on the parcels so that future residents could not complain about odors, noise, or vibrations. The City approved the oil company's plan to make residents human shields without agency to complain.

Our organized opposition to the company's expansion stopped the plan, however, that was insufficient to protect our community's health and safety.



An oil tanker truck with a sign reading "Justice Delayed is Justice Denied" sits outside the Jefferson Drill Site.



Community residents protesting at the gates of the Jefferson Drill Site, with the oil rig looming in the background. Inset: An oil rig at the Jefferson Drill Site looming over a nearby home.

Facing mounting pressure, the City reluctantly opened a plan approval process to address community concerns. Residents asked the City to enclose the drill site and mandate the use of electric workover rigs instead of diesel. The City had given these protections to West LA communities decades earlier.

The City agreed. The oil company lost its appeal of the decision, then turned to the courts. We followed the oil company to court, working with a talented legal team at Earthjustice, a nonprofit public interest environmental law organization. The oil company then announced that it would rather close down than comply with the new conditions.

We celebrated this outcome. However, we knew that if we did not prepare to shape the future of the drill site, a new violence of displacement would replace the toxic violence of oil extraction. Drive-by developers are rapidly remaking our neighborhood, driving up rents and tearing down homes to build student housing.

While the oil company went to work capping the oil wells, we went to work bringing neighbors together to create a

new, shared vision for the site. Our community coalesced around creating a community park, affordable housing, and a community center.

Next, the Liberty Hill Foundation introduced us to an experienced park developer. Over the past three years, we worked together on a strategy for developing the site, fundraising, and hosting six neighborhood charrettes to keep residents engaged.

To build support for the project, we conducted outreach to elected leaders, including State Assemblymember Reggie Jones-Sawyer. The Assemblymember toured the drill site with Redeemer Community Partnership and then worked with us to secure a \$10 million state grant to support the acquisition of the property.

If we can acquire the property, we will have an enormous amount of work to do in the coming months and years. Additional remediation is likely, and details are still being figured out with state regulators. Fundraising for the park and affordable housing will take time. As the funding is secured, then the planning and construction of the improvements will take place.

We take great joy in the prospect of renewing the land for the blessing of our community. We hope our work will serve as both an inspiration and guide for how other communities can take on environmental racism and injustice to build and become a beloved community.



Rendering of future plans for a community park located where the Jefferson Drill Site once stood.



Wilmington vs Warren E&P: The Ongoing Fight Against Discriminatory and Illegal Rubber-Stamping of Oil Wells in Their Neighborhood

Wilmington youth leaders at a climate march in downtown Los Angeles urging Governor Gavin Newsom to take action.

By Bahram Fazeli and Ashley Hernandez, *Communities for a Better Environment*

Residents of Wilmington, a neighborhood in the Harbor region of Los Angeles, gathered one morning in June 2022 outside the John Mendez Baseball Park, as oil rigs loomed at the Banning drill site. With signs reading “Basta Warren E&P” (*basta* meaning “enough” in Spanish) and “CalGEM shares the blame” in the background of their press conference, residents and members of Communities for a Better Environment revealed that oil company Warren E&P has been drilling illegally in their community.

Nearly 2,000 active or idle oil wells are located in the City of Los Angeles. More than half of the active wells are concentrated in Wilmington. Oil drilling, in addition to two of the nation’s busiest ports and five oil refineries also surrounding the community, has cumulatively polluted Wilmington’s air.

“When I go on bike rides near this baseball field behind me and see the children exercising next to oil drilling operations that you could smell, I think about how dangerous it is to their health,” said Wilmington resident Nizgui Gomez, 20, who grew up in the community and has been involved with Communities for a Better Environment’s youth program since she was 15.

The oil drilling facility next to John Mendez Baseball Park operates 226 wells, with one oil well sitting just 50 feet from the baseball field. At its closest point to homes, an oil well is just 100 feet from bedroom windows.

The illegal drilling is just another instance in a pattern of disrespect for community health and safety by the oil company and regulators. In 2006, the City’s zoning administrator approved an expansion of Warren E&P’s



Wilmington residents and advocates joined by U.S. Congresswoman Nanette Barragan at a press conference to announce Warren Resources' illegal drilling practices.

operations in the area, allowing the company to drill 540 new oil wells over 12 years. For decades, these wells operated largely unchecked, with little oversight from City or state regulators to protect the health or safety of the more than 90 percent Latinx community living nearby.

Living close to oil operations, residents are exposed to toxic chemicals from drilling operations including hydrogen sulfide, methane, and benzene, all known carcinogens and endocrine disruptors. As neighbors experienced chronic headaches and more frequent asthma attacks, it became clear that despite living near highly concentrated oil wells, Wilmington had far fewer protections than communities in whiter, wealthier neighborhoods of Los Angeles living near oil infrastructure.

In 2015, Communities for a Better Environment's Youth for Environmental Justice decided to take legal action. Alongside the South Central Youth Leadership Coalition and the Center for Biological Diversity, this group of young Wilmington residents filed a lawsuit against the City of LA alleging that the City was systematically violating the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by rubber-stamping drilling applications, and violating state protections against racial discrimination by imposing lesser health and safety rules in communities of color than in white communities.

Finally in 2016, the City issued a new set of forms and rules for oil well applications ("ZA Memo 133") to be considered and evaluated, which now included public hearings and more stringent environmental review under CEQA. The youths' lawsuit was later successfully settled.

However, community concerns continued, fearing that the new application process would do little to protect their families or change the health impacts they felt daily.



Wilmington and South LA youth environmental justice lawsuit plaintiffs and attorneys outside the Supreme Court of California.

As neighbors feared, Warren E&P continued to skirt around the laws and safety regulations designed to protect public health. Between December 2018 and December 2021, the company filed several notices of intent to drill with California's oil and gas regulatory agency (California Geologic Energy Management or CalGEM) relying on gross misrepresentations, including expired City approval and the signature of a former employee who had not been employed by the City for over a decade. California regulators approved dozens of these drilling permits. Records show that more than 4.3 million pounds of carcinogens and 4.6 million pounds of endocrine-disrupting chemicals have been used at the facility since 2013.



Nizgui Gomez, Wilmington youth environmental justice leader, at the youth climate march in Downtown LA.

Warren E&P effectively rubber-stamped their own application to drill in the community by side-stepping the City's health and safety guidelines, evading public review, and dodging environmental review under CEQA. Once again, it proves that no amount of regulation can protect communities from oil operations in such close proximity to homes, schools, and parks.

Neighborhood oil drilling is an inherently unsafe operation even under the strictest of permit conditions and most rigorous of enforcement actions. However, as we have seen repeatedly in Wilmington and elsewhere, oil drilling operators do not comply even with the most basic levels of their permit conditions and frequently violate their regulatory requirements. Additionally, regulatory agencies rarely impose the strictest of conditions and often do not enforce permit requirements.

When Communities for a Better Environment discovered these violations, we shared the news with our members living in the community, asking them what action they wanted to take. We took a vote and residents were clear: they wanted to draft an opposition letter to the City and take this information to the press. We followed their lead.

"We are surrounded by industries that are polluting our communities and have polluters right next to our homes, schools, and parks," said Gomez at the press conference where the revelations of Warren's illegal drilling were unveiled.

Warren E&P was improperly granted numerous permits by CalGEM and performed work under at least six permits to illegally intensify existing operations with no environmental

As a community, we did it the right way, the correct way, the legal way. And still, we don't have the justice we deserve because simply put, no oil drilling is safe!

review. The company argues that the approval they received for the expansion in 2006 still applied to their December 2018 - 2021 permit applications. However, even the City's Planning Department confirms that those permissions expired in August 2018, upholding the need for environmental review and City approval for new applications.

Communities for a Better Environment is partnering with local community members to prepare for a City of Los Angeles Zoning Administrator hearing that will determine the validity of Warren's post-2018 permits.

Meanwhile, as the City of Los Angeles finalized its commitment to phasing out oil drilling citywide in December 2022, the community is ready to start visioning alternative land uses. We need to ensure that the community's voice has a say in the future of this land.

The community deserves to see real investment in an area that has faced disinvestment for so long. We hope to see that a phase-out is just the beginning of a new era of health and dignity for Wilmington.



Birds-eye view of Wilmington neighborhood, showing the proximity of Warren Resources' drilling operations to the baseball field and homes.



The Faith to Fight for Environmental Justice: Communities Demand Fair Protections at the Murphy Oil Drilling Site

Residents and advocates with Redeemer Community Partnership and Holman United Methodist Church gathered for a teach-in outside the Murphy Drill Site to demand equal protections from the City Zoning Administrator.

By Richard Parks, Redeemer Community Partnership, and Reverend Louis A. Chase, Holman United Methodist Church

At 4:00 a.m. one chilly, dark morning in February 2022, we met up outside the Murphy drill site in South Los Angeles to prepare for dozens of neighborhood residents, members of Redeemer Community Partnership, and worshippers from Holman United Methodist Church to join us in a pop-up protest.

Hours earlier, we learned that oil company E&B Natural Resources (E&B) planned to perform a highly toxic acid maintenance job: Five-thousand-gallon tanker trucks carrying carcinogenic acids would arrive in the neighborhood just as 1,300 K-12 students took their seats in three schools less than 1,000 feet from the drill site. The Los Angeles Municipal Code requires a Determination of Conditions for this work. E&B had not bothered to get a permit and the City once again refused to intervene to stop it. We gathered in the darkness to shine a light on the City's malign neglect.

This was another violation among many by the oil company:

- We have documented more than 50 instances of E&B leaving the drill site unattended at night—sometimes for more than five hours—in violation of its Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) safety plan. At times, emergency lights flashed across the drill site with no one there to respond.
- We have photographed workers smoking on the drill site, and others without personal protective gear being drenched with oil. Cal/OSHA investigated and issued four citations—three for serious violations—and fined E&B \$12,000 for violating worker safety rules.
- In November of 2021, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) issued a Notice of Violation to E&B for a “vapor leak greater than 50,000 ppm.” Inspector reports revealed that the leak was actually “greater than 100,000 ppm”—twice the explosive level of methane.

- In April of 2021, we photographed a truck transporting and deploying radioactive isotopes at the drill site. The California Highway Patrol later determined that the vehicle had not been legal for roadway use for more than 12 years.

These illegal activities are just the visible tip of the iceberg. Daily, the drill site emits pollution that harms the health of the surrounding community. In a recent peer-reviewed study, University of Southern California and Occidental College faculty conducted diagnostic testing of 747 residents living within 1,000 meters (3,200 feet) downwind of the Murphy and AllenCo oil drill sites. They found that residents had a substantial (and likely permanent) loss of lung function, similar to what you would see in someone with daily exposure to secondhand cigarette smoke.



School children standing outside the Murphy Drill Site, holding protest signs noting how close they live to the oil wells.

Idle oil wells create a pathway for toxic and explosive fumes to reach the surface. Therefore, the LA Fire Code requires the fire chief to order oil wells that stop producing for 12 months to be re-activated or plugged. One well at the Murphy drill site has been idle for more than four years. The fire chief refuses to order it plugged or re-activated. In the face of stonewalling, Redeemer and environmental law non-profit Earthjustice asked the courts to intervene. The judge ruled that the fire chief has a discretionary duty to act. That is: she has the authority to act, but chooses not to.

Meanwhile, the violations mount. In September 2022, the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) of the California Department of Conservation issued a Notice of Violation to E&B for failing to perform a four-year safety inspection on the idle well.

Sometimes, City agencies inexplicably prioritize corporate wealth over public health. When we informed the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) that E&B was violating its Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure safety plan by leaving the drill site unattended at night, the LAFD inspector issued one violation notice and told the oil company that it could avoid future violations by retracting its commitment to 24/7 staffing—even though doing so would weaken its safety plan. In March of 2022, the oil company took LAFD’s advice.

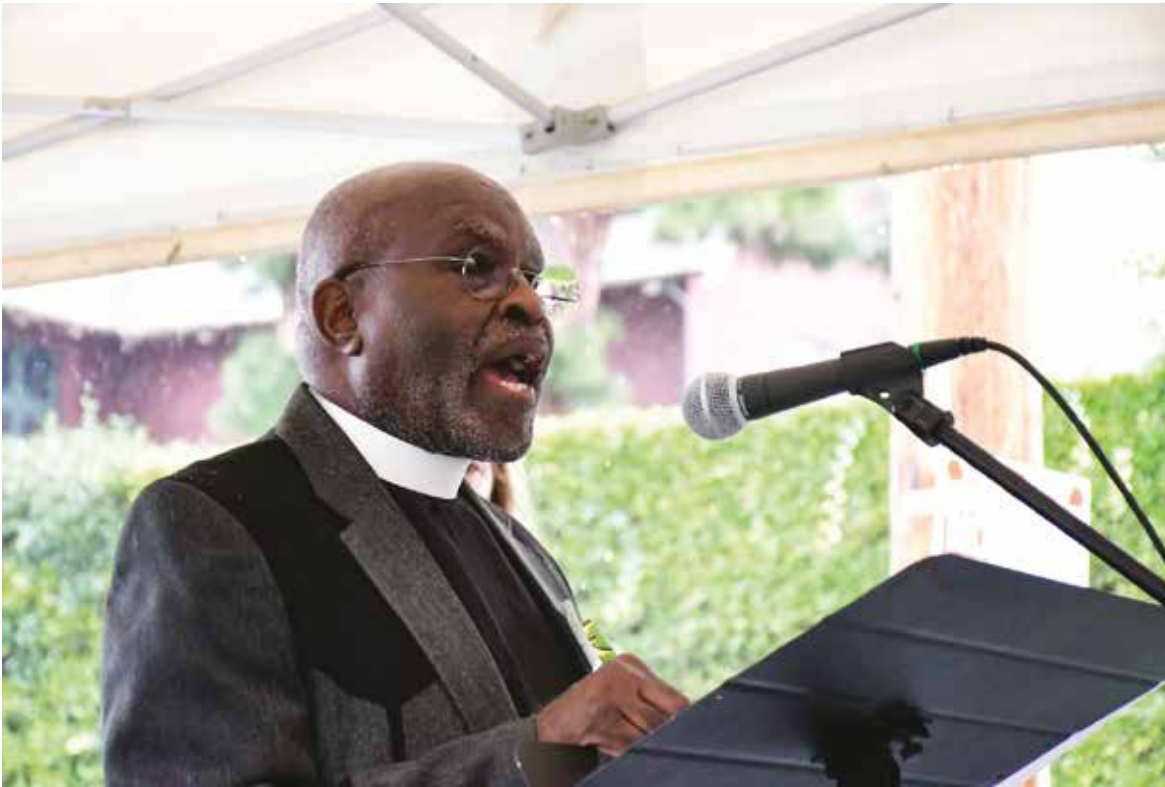
Oil industry spokespeople like to say that theirs is the most regulated industry in the most regulated state in the



School children dressed as “canaries in a coal mine” marching outside Holman United Methodist Church to the Murphy Drill Site, demanding healthier communities.

Despite Los Angeles’ ordinance to phase out oil drilling, the community surrounding the Murphy site continues to live with the daily threat of oil pollution. The City has tools to protect the health and safety of residents—but chooses not to use them.

The LA municipal code requires a Determination of Conditions before oil companies perform acid maintenance. Oil companies regularly ignore the requirement. Until January 2023, the Planning Department said it could not enforce the code until it defined “maintenance,” something it refused to do for years. Meanwhile, acid tankers rolled into the neighborhood with no warning for families to move their children out of harm’s way. We have seen fumes from these acid jobs kill plants outside of a drill site.



Holman United Methodist Church's Reverend Louis A. Chase speaking at a teach-in outside the Murphy Drill Site to demand equal protections from the City Zoning Administrator.

world. Year after year, they are also the biggest lobbyists in Sacramento. The oil industry lobbied its way into designing a fragmented regulatory system, and then made certain that each agency lacked the resources to investigate, collaborate, and regulate. The system is broken by design. The only safe path for communities like ours is to end a toxic land use that is fundamentally incompatible with residential neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, residents have filled the regulatory gaps by vigilantly documenting and reporting violations and keeping various agencies informed about what each is doing so that the City, regulators, and residents have a comprehensive view of how operations hurt the community.

This work motivated the City to order E&B to file a 'Plan Approval', a process for holding a public hearing to evaluate the oil company's compliance with its operating conditions and whether those conditions are strong enough to protect public health and safety.

Residents asked the City to use its power to extend three protections given to wealthier, whiter, West LA communities more than 20 years ago: (1) enclose the drill site to keep toxic fumes out of nearby homes, (2) use electric workover rigs instead of diesel to reduce pollution, and (3) power the facility with an electric utility connection instead of on-site methane generators to reduce emissions.



Murphy Drill Site with multi-family apartments in the background.

In February 2023, we received the City's determination. Siding with calls from the community for equal protections, the City ordered E&B to electrify and enclose the Murphy drill site. With this move, the City ended decades of disparate and discriminatory treatment of South LA residents. The persistence of the community to denounce sacrificial zoning and environmental racism, and instead demand health and justice, won.

Although this is not the end of the community's journey for justice, it is a signal that the community may soon breathe easier.



Door-Knocking to Demand Environmental Justice For Communities Around the Inglewood Oil Field

Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell speaking at a press conference at the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' historic vote to phase out oil drilling.

By Tianna Shaw Wakeman and Astrid Williams, *Black Women for Wellness*; Gloria Medina, *Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education*; and Maro Kakoussian and Eric Romann, *Physicians for Social Responsibility* – Los Angeles

In February 2022, canvassers marched up and down the steep, sloping neighborhood streets of Baldwin Hills, Ladera Heights, and View Park, knocking on doors to speak with residents about their toxic neighbor: the Inglewood Oil Field. As the largest urban oil field in the nation, the Inglewood Oil Field spans 1,000 acres, and is situated within a mile of over one million residents in Baldwin Hills, Inglewood, and Culver City.

Each time residents answered their door, they were asked about their understanding of the oil field, if they felt the oil wells had an impact on their health, and whether they supported ending neighborhood drilling.

Organized by Black Women for Wellness and Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE) with

support from the STAND-L.A. coalition and Liberty Hill, the canvassing was the beginning of new efforts to build relationships, engage residents, and grow awareness in the community.

Back in 2008, residents mobilized around six hearings to share their health and safety concerns about the oil field. In response, Los Angeles County established a Community Standards District (CSD) to oversee new regulations intended to protect public health and safety. The creation of the CSD included establishing a Community Advisory Panel to allow residents a voice in monitoring operations at the oil field. However, the District's regulations failed to comfort residents, who continued to smell noxious odors, find deep cracks across their backyard patios and in the

walls of their homes, and feel vibrations and shaking, presumably from oil operations.

Regina Martin, one of the canvassers knocking on doors for Black Women for Wellness, grew up near the oil field and still lives in the nearby Windsor Hills community.

“Growing up as a little girl in the area, there was always a harsh smell when we were driving home or out in the neighborhood. The smell was always there to remind you of the oil wells,” said Martin. “As an adult, when I moved a few blocks away to Windsor Hills, I remember a really scary experience of feeling violent shaking in our home—but it wasn’t an earthquake. There was a boom like a bomb going off, and I think it had to be from the drilling. As I canvassed in the neighborhood where I grew up, my neighbors and I exchanged our thoughts and experiences with each other. I could feel the power building as we connected and worked together as a community.”

Community Advisory Panel meetings were intended to serve as a venue for residents across Baldwin Hills and Inglewood to share concerns and stimulate protective action by the operators. However, they fell short of expectations. The oil company operating the field and the technical consultants dominated meetings, dismissing the lived experiences of residents. By enabling the oil industry to dispute and disregard residents for over 10 years, the CSD failed to keep pace with developments in surrounding communities.

Notably, residents of Culver City, the predominantly white, wealthy community that includes roughly 10 percent of the Inglewood Oil Field within its limits, waged a years-long grassroots campaign that culminated in their City Council voting in the summer of 2021 to phase out drilling in its portion of the oil field.

Los Angeles County’s Board of Supervisors, undergoing a major political shift at the end of 2020, picked up on Culver City’s momentum and unanimously approved a fall 2021 motion to prohibit new drilling and phase out existing drilling throughout the entire county. However, due to the complexity of LA County’s zoning code, the Board’s directive must be implemented through a series of new ordinances and amendments, a process that began in 2022 and will continue through subsequent months and even years. The leaders of Black Women for Wellness and SCOPE knew we needed to organize the community to speak up.



Regina Martin, canvasser with Black Women for Wellness and resident of Windsor Hills near the Inglewood Oil Field.

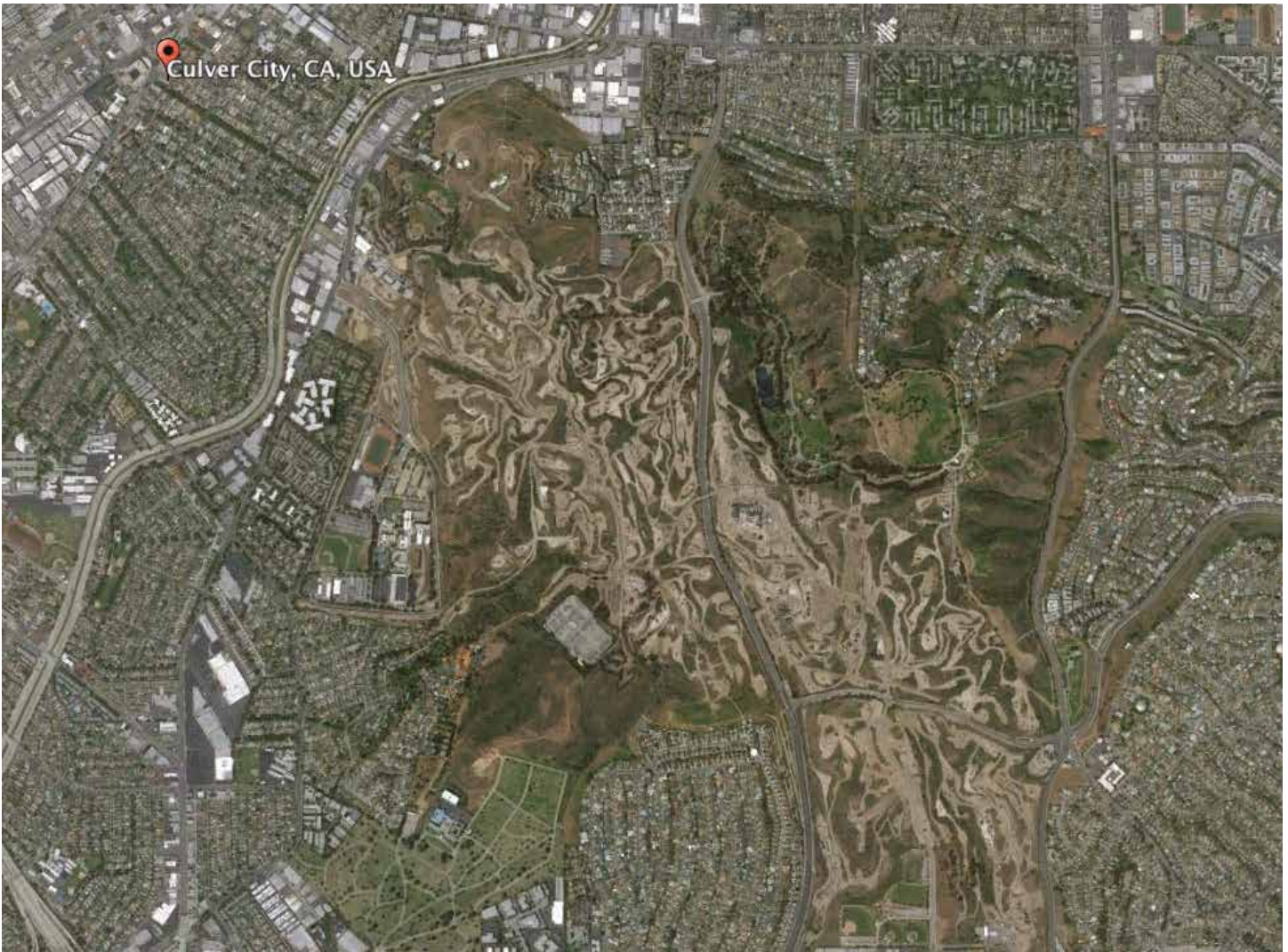
From canvassing trips to the Baldwin Hills neighborhood in the spring of 2022, our teams contacted over 14,000 households. Their views on the Inglewood Oil Field were loud and clear.

The survey responses collected from nearly 3,000 residents confirmed the scope of the harm being done by the oil field:

- 73 percent were somewhat or very aware that the nearby oil field can cause health problems.
- 60 percent reported knowing someone who had potentially been affected (by either asthma, cancer, headaches, nosebleeds, low birth weight/premature birth, or other health impacts) due to living near the oil field.
- 79 percent were willing to contact the County right then to support the end of oil drilling at the Inglewood Oil Field.

And many residents followed through—sending nearly 750 unique letters to the Board of Supervisors to support an end to oil drilling in L.A. County. This tangible result and active community engagement shows us why dedicating thousands of steps and hundreds of hours of work is worth it.

On January 24, 2023, the County of Los Angeles took a major unprecedented vote to end oil drilling by approving



Aerial Photo of Inglewood Oil Field.

an ordinance that prohibits drilling of new wells and starts a process and timeline for phasing out hundreds of existing wells within unincorporated LA County.

However, this ordinance does not apply to the Inglewood Oil Field. Continued organizing and advocacy is necessary to ensure that the predominantly Black neighborhood that surrounds the field is not left behind.

From the first knock on a door, our organizations are building relationships and lifting the voices of Black and Brown communities to demand cleaner air and healthier communities. This power-building is critical: It will take continued community engagement and outreach to urge the County to ensure that the oil wells in the Inglewood Oil Field are phased out on a timeline similar to that of the rest of Los Angeles.

Connecting with the community also reminds us who we're fighting for. The survey responses show that real lives are being affected by oil drilling and they have been for decades.

Equity is about ensuring those communities that have been most harmed receive the most benefits. It's about making sure that, once this oil field is finally closed, the next use of the land will not perpetuate further damage to our communities through gentrification or unwanted development. Our goal is to ensure that this work benefits the residents who have historically lived here and borne the brunt of toxic oil pollution.

We have a long road ahead to get the Inglewood Oil Field fully shut down. It will take sustained community outreach, relationship-building, and persistence—but it starts with a knock on the door.



The Law and Ending Oil Drilling in Los Angeles

By Paulina Torres, *Nature Program, Natural Resources Defense Council*; Alison Hahm, *Communities for a Better Environment*; Liz Jones, *Climate Law Institute, Center for Biological Diversity*; Damon Nagami, *Natural Resources Defense Council*; Maya Golden-Krasner, *Center for Biological Diversity*

Introduction

Frontline residents throughout Los Angeles began organizing over a decade ago to stop the air, water, soil, and climate pollution caused by neighborhood oil drilling. Historically both the Los Angeles City and County municipal codes were written to encourage oil and gas production, likely due to the tremendous economic and political influence of the oil industry. The codes allowed drilling with little oversight within just a few hundred feet of homes, schools, parks, and hospitals. Although drilling near residences and other sensitive sites in the City and County was supposed to involve a review process to consider conditions to protect communities and lessen environmental impacts, residents and community groups continued to find the system flawed.

Over time, momentum grew: residents and organizers demanded not only compliance with existing laws, but also

an end to neighborhood oil drilling. Initially, advocates called for a mandatory citywide setback of 1,500 feet between oil wells and sensitive sites, later increased to 2,500 feet as new scientific research documented the clear and harmful health impacts of proximity to oil extraction. Ultimately, public pressure grew and evolved to demand the end of oil drilling in Los Angeles, to protect people's health and curb fossil fuel emissions driving the climate crisis. Advocates urged the City and County to first declare oil and gas extraction activities a "nonconforming land use" so that no new wells could be drilled, then to phase out existing operations as quickly as possible.

Local Government Authority to Protect Health and Safety

Courts have long recognized the authority of local governments to use their zoning and police powers to enact local prohibitions and restrictions on oil and gas operations

and development.¹ A municipality has an “unquestioned right to regulate the business of operating oil wells within its limits, and to prohibit their operation within delineated areas and districts, if reason appears for so doing.”²

Local governments also have the power to use land use zoning policies to protect public welfare, health, and safety. Given the well-established and growing literature that oil production activities harm human health and the environment, STAND-L.A. and other organizations encouraged the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles County to amend their zoning policies to declare oil drilling operations to be legally nonconforming land uses. A nonconforming land use is generally defined as a land use that was legal within particular areas or zones when initially permitted and established, but is no longer permitted because it does not conform to the standards of current zoning regulations. Courts have upheld the validity of local governments’ designation of certain uses as nonconforming as a permissible exercise of local police powers, including to prohibit oil drilling operations.³ Other examples of nonconforming uses in the Los Angeles City and County codes include junk yards, commercial animal keeping operations, parking lots, and industrial facilities in designated areas.

The legal rationale behind a nonconforming land use designation is that activities will be prohibited moving

forward to avoid a retroactive invalidation of an existing legal right or an unconstitutional taking of private property. In many jurisdictions, declaring an activity a legally nonconforming use starts an operational phase-out clock (or amortization period) for existing operations; when the clock expires, it is assumed that the competing interests of a landowner’s property rights and a local agency’s need to implement the zoning change to benefit public health and welfare have been appropriately balanced. In both Los Angeles City and County, this default amortization timeline is 20 years.⁴

However, the default amortization period can be shortened and both the City and County of Los Angeles have announced their intention to do so. To determine an appropriate amortization period, the jurisdictions can use well-established reasonableness factors to weigh the public benefits from removing the nonconforming use against the private losses incurred.⁵ In the oil drilling context, this approach was successfully utilized by Culver City, which commissioned a study to determine what a reasonable amortization period would be for the oil wells within its jurisdiction. The study found that the operator achieved amortization of its capital investment within four to five years of purchasing the wells.⁶ In addition, even if particular wells fell short of the five-year amortization mark, the study confirmed that high returns from performing wells offset low returns from marginal wells. Los Angeles County

¹ Cal. Const. Article XI §§ 5, 7 [Section 11 was renumbered as Section 7 in 1970] (“A county or city may make and enforce within its limits all local, police, sanitary, and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws.”); Pub. Res. Code § 3690; *Richeson v. Helal*, 158 Cal. App. 4th 268, 277 (2007).

² *Beverly Oil Co. v. City of Los Angeles*, 40 Cal. 2d 552, 558 (1953) (internal quotation omitted); see also California Attorney General’s Opinion, 59 Ops. Cal. Atty. Gen. 461, 465 (1976) (“[I]t is our opinion that cities and counties have the power to prohibit [oil and gas] operations.”).

³ *Beverly Oil*, 40 Cal. 2d at 558.

⁴ City of Los Angeles Municipal Code § 12.23.C.4(b) (amended 2022); County of Los Angeles Municipal Code § 22.172.050(B) (2022).

⁵ *Metromedia, Inc. v. San Diego*, 26 Cal. 3d 848, 882 (1980), *rev’d on other grounds*, 453 U.S. 490 (1981). The factors to be weighed include: the amount of the investment or original cost; present actual or depreciated value; dates of construction; amortization for tax purposes (deductions); salvage value; length of the remaining term for a lease; remaining useful life of the nonconforming use; harm to the public if the amortized use remains beyond the prescribed amortization period; cost of removal; and remaining value or allowed uses of the property after removal. *United Bus. Comm’n v. City of San Diego*, 91 Cal. App. 3d 156, 181 (1979); *City of Los Angeles v. Gage*, 127 Cal. App. 2d 442, 61 (1954).

⁶ Cheek, William, et al., Capital Investment Amortization Study for the City of Culver City Portion of the Inglewood Oil Field (May 29, 2020) (utilizing two methods to calculate the reasonable amortization period: modeling the time for amortization of capital investment (“ACI”) for Sentinel’s investment when it acquired Freeport McMoRan’s portfolio of California oil and gas production properties, and modeling the time for ACI based on the original costs to drill and complete the wells and infrastructure made by other operators in the Inglewood Oil Field between 1925 and 2016), available at <https://www.culvercity.org/files/assets/public/documents/citymanager/inglewood-oil-field/bakerobrienreportandexhibi.pdf>.



Governor Newsom talks with Darryl Molina Sarmiento, executive director of Communities for a Better Environment, and announces 3,200 foot setback rule in October 2021 in Wilmington, California, joined by Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi and Senator Lena A. Gonzalez.

has selected a firm to begin work on an amortization study of its own, with results expected in late 2023 and early 2024. The City of Los Angeles has also retained three consultants for a period of three years to determine amortization periods for oil production facilities and existing wells citywide. Once the studies are completed, the City and County can amend their zoning codes to implement shortened phase-out periods.

Declaring oil and gas extraction activities a nonconforming land use is administratively simple, and pairing that nonconforming land use designation with an amortization study to shorten the phase-out to the shortest time period that is legally defensible achieves STAND-L.A.'s core goals of prohibiting all new drilling and ending existing drilling as soon as possible. However, as highlighted by the circumstances at the Murphy drill site and the Warren E&P site in Wilmington, the City and County must assure operators comply with all health, safety, and environmental regulations in the meantime, while we wait for the completion of the studies and for the phase-out period to conclude.

Los Angeles County and City Oil Drilling Ordinances

Both Los Angeles County and City took action to respond to advocacy from communities that have been subjected to the pollution and dangers of oil drilling for generations.

The City of Los Angeles passed a motion to phase out oil drilling and, in December 2022, passed a corresponding oil and gas drilling ordinance. The ordinance prohibits new drilling in the City of Los Angeles and designates existing oil operations—which includes about 590 active wells and 1,347 idle wells—a nonconforming land use. The ordinance is significant because it not only prohibits the drilling of new wells, but it also prohibits certain activities that enhance production and have health and safety risks, such as acid treatment, reworking, and sidetracking.⁷ The City has also committed to drafting a new policy to ensure that oil operators bear the costs of properly abandoning wells and remediating well sites for other future uses.

In 2021, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a motion instructing the Department of Regional

⁷ Acid treatments are a form of well stimulation, which typically involves pumping hydrochloric acid into an oil-bearing rock under high pressure to increase oil production. Reworking includes efforts to restore the volume of hydrocarbons produced by a given well including well stimulation. Sidetracking is a drilling operation that uses a portion of an existing wellbore to create a new wellbore for the same well. Sidetracking is typically performed to bypass a portion of the existing wellbore that is unable to be re-entered because of blockages formed by sticky oil deposits in the original wellbore's path that cannot be drilled through. See American Petroleum Institute website terms and definitions, See <https://www.api.org/oil-and-natural-gas/wells-to-consumer/exploration-and-production/hydraulic-fracturing/acidizing-treatment-in-oil-and-gas-opera> (last visited Dec. 22, 2022).

Planning to prepare an oil well ordinance that would amend the County's Land Use and Zoning Code to prohibit new oil and gas drilling in unincorporated Los Angeles County and designate existing oil production a nonconforming land use. The Board of Supervisors also directed several County agencies to establish a process to clean up and remediate idle oil well sites, and to develop a strategy for a just transition away from fossil fuels. In January 2023, the Board took its final vote to formally approve the ordinance, which affects approximately 473 existing oil wells in the unincorporated areas of the County. The ordinance's scope excluded 1,547 active or idle oil wells in unincorporated areas within the Baldwin Hills Community Standards District, in areas designated as specific plans, and that are operating under a valid discretionary permit. With consistent pressure from advocates including STAND-L.A., the County has committed to concurrently amend the Baldwin Hills Community Standards District, which governs the Inglewood Oil Field, and to take separate actions to address wells subject to discretionary permits and specific plans to ensure that all LA County wells are phased out as soon as legally possible.

Other Legal Issues

Three oil operators and several oil interest holders and associations have already sued the City of Los Angeles over the ordinance to phase out oil extraction. As explained above, the approach used by the local governments has ample legal support, but that has not stopped the industry from trying to overturn restrictions in the past.

For example, oil industry actors filed suit over Measure Z, which voters in Monterey County passed in 2016 to (1) ban fracking; (2) prohibit land uses that support new oil and gas wells; and (3) phase out industry wastewater disposal. In 2021, the Court of Appeal acknowledged the longstanding rights of local jurisdictions not only to regulate the location of drilling operations, but also "ban oil operations entirely," regulate "zoning, fire prevention,

public safety, nuisance, appearance, noise, fencing, hours of operation, abandonment, and inspection," regulate drilling on tidelands, require local permits, and restrict drilling to particular zoning districts. At the same time, the Court found certain aspects of the measure were "preempted" by state law. The California Supreme Court has agreed to review this decision.⁸

On February 3, 2023, California's Secretary of State announced that oil industry sponsors had collected enough petition signatures to qualify a referendum⁹ to overturn Senate Bill 1137 (Gonzalez, 2022), a state law banning new oil drilling within 3,200 feet of sensitive sites like homes, schools, and hospitals.¹⁰ Similar protections can and should still be provided through state oil regulator CalGEM's ongoing public health and safety rulemaking process regardless of SB 1137. However, the formally qualified referendum will now delay implementation of SB 1137 until after a vote by the people in the November 5, 2024, general election. Because local government's authority over land use takes precedence, neither SB 1137 nor the outcome of the referendum to rescind it will impact Los Angeles City's or County's recent ordinances on oil drilling.

There is no safe way to drill for oil in residential neighborhoods. It is therefore critical for Los Angeles City and County to move their amortization studies forward quickly so that drilling can be phased out as soon as possible. When the City and County successfully end oil drilling in their jurisdictions, they will be a model for other jurisdictions to follow.

⁸ Appellate Courts Case Information, *Chevron U.S.A. v. County of Monterey (Protect Monterey County)*, https://appellatecases.courtinfo.ca.gov/search/case/dockets.cfm?dist=0&doc_id=2368120&doc_no=S271869&request_token=NiIwLSEmPkw%2BW1BVSCM9TEIIQEQUUDxTJCJOJzxCg%3D%3D (last visited Dec. 22, 2022).

⁹ California Secretary of State, <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-measures/qualified-ballot-measures>

¹⁰ Attorney General of California, Referendum Challenging 2022 Law Prohibiting New Oil and Gas Wells Near Homes, Schools, and Hospitals, [https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/Title%20and%20Summary%20\(22-0006\).pdf](https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/Title%20and%20Summary%20(22-0006).pdf) (last visited Sept. 29, 2022).



Leading The Way Toward a Just Transition For Workers and Communities

By Bahram Fazeli (*Communities for a Better Environment*), Michele Prichard (*Liberty Hill Foundation*), Martha Dina Argüello and Eric Romann (*Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles and STAND-L.A.*), members of the City and County of Los Angeles Just Transition Task Force

The Los Angeles region is leading the country in phasing out oil drilling. With advanced planning, it is also positioned to be a leader to protect the oil production workers and adjacent communities that will be most impacted by the phase-out to assure that they will be able to survive and thrive into the future.

The concept of “just transition” planning has its roots in a number of historical events as early as the 1970s when assistance programs were set up to support workers who had been impacted by globalization¹ and when labor union leaders, notably the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) union, responded to large-scale job losses at toxic Superfund worksites with a call for worker retraining, community clean-up, and a rethinking of harmful,

industrial production. Since then, “just transition” planning has taken place across the U.S. and Europe, especially in communities impacted by the decline of coal mining and other industries. Los Angeles is trying to break ground as the first region in the U.S. to get ahead in setting up replicable programs, policies, and projects in response to jobs impacted by phasing out oil extraction. In the context of California’s bigger plans to phase out oil and gas and get rid of our reliance on fossil fuels, the few hundred oil extraction jobs in Los Angeles serve as a good start to put our vision into practice.

While much of the current national discussion about the “just transition” from oil and gas is somewhat conceptual, Los Angeles is dissecting the problem and detailing

¹ Cha, J. Mijin et al. A Roadmap to an Equitable Low Carbon Future: Four Pillars for a Just Transition. April 2019 https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/JUST_TRANSITION_Report_FINAL_12-19.pdf

concrete goals, strategies, and actions to provide a roadmap for current and future planning. While significant work lies ahead, we launched an initial effort to engage diverse and frequently opposing interests into a respectful and open dialogue to outline practical next steps for protecting workers, their families, and surrounding communities as we begin the shift to a new, clean-energy economy.

In 2022 the Los Angeles City and County Chief Sustainability Offices established the Just Transition Task Force. Both jurisdictions previously had adopted comprehensive sustainability plans (LA's [Green New Deal](#) and [OurCounty](#) plans, respectively) to move toward a “fossil fuel free” future. Both were working to approve the phase-out ordinances. The Task Force built upon an initial effort started in 2021 by the county that focused on the potential for transitioning oil extraction workers into comprehensive remediation of idle and orphaned oil wells that leak both toxic chemicals and methane, threatening public health and accelerating climate change. In the second phase during 2022, the Task Force decided to look more broadly at the problem and develop strategies for protecting workers, restoring and repurposing the land, and identifying funding streams that could support full implementation of these goals.

The Los Angeles Just Transition Task Force included 27 members representing labor, industry, tribal nations, environmental justice and environmental organizations, workforce development, academic institutions, youth, and state and local government. The Task Force met frequently during 2022 and was co-chaired by staff members from the city and county with facilitation by the [Just Transition Fund](#), a nonprofit entity supporting communities to plan for low-carbon, equitable, and inclusive economies. [Intelligent Partnerships](#), a research consulting firm, assisted the Task Force to analyze the current oil extraction workforce in LA County.

Key findings of [Intelligent Partnerships' research](#) included that an estimated 664 workers are engaged in oil extraction activities in all of LA County, representing a wide range of skill sets and pay scales. Only 10% of these workers are unionized. Importantly, “green energy jobs” were cited by 63% of the workers as a top field of interest for retraining, and assuming parity in wages and benefits. Further, with Los Angeles’ booming job growth in transportation electrification, green water and waste



management infrastructure, solar energy production, and zero-emission vehicles, many occupations would align well with the skills and salaries of current oil extraction workers.

The Task Force recommended goals, strategies, and detailed actions to launch a tangible program for assisting workers, meeting the needs of neighboring communities and tribal nations (the original owners of the land), and figuring out how to pay for these visionary plans. The full plan can be found in the [December 2022 report](#), and seeks to address these key goals:

GOAL 1: PROTECT WORKERS AND PREPARE FOR THEIR FUTURES. *Provide oil workers impacted by the phase-out of drilling and extraction of oil with the necessary support to transition their skills into jobs of comparable, family-sustaining compensation or retirement in ways that promote livelihoods and dignity.*

Sample strategies include: Creating a workers advisory council to provide guidance to and engage with the city and county as plans are made; working with current training programs to connect workers to economic growth sectors, such as solar and renewable energy production, transportation electrification, and oil well remediation; supporting workers through a “navigators” program to assist with access to retraining, re-employment, and safety net resources; incentivizing private employers to hire dislocated workers; expanding project labor agreements to create high-wage jobs.

GOAL 2: CLEAN UP SITES WITH COMMUNITY AND INDIGENOUS GUIDANCE. *Properly remediate and monitor impacts of closing oil well sites, and integrate co-visioning and input from sovereign native nations on whose ancestral homelands Los Angeles is built—Tongva, Tataviam, Serrano, Kizh, and Chumash—and frontline communities in visioning, remediation, and land use redevelopment planning processes.*

Sample strategies include: Initiating general plan amendments at both the city and county to require that redevelopment of former oil sites embrace tribal consultation and neighboring community engagement to assure environmental justice, tribal access, proper remediation (including bioremediation), avoidance of gentrification and displacement, and meeting community needs. Community education and engagement—including specific consultations with native nations—should be conducted as early as possible, along with enforcement of state-mandated remediation standards, and exploratory discussions of land conservancy and repatriation.

GOAL 3: FINANCE AND COORDINATE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION. *Leverage public and private funds to equitably and sustainably finance and coordinate the successful implementation of strategy and action recommendations, with ongoing accountability, transparency, and advising from the Just Transition Task Force.*

Sample strategies include: Continuing and expanding the joint city/county collaboration to compete for federal and state grants; continuing and expanding the Task Force itself to provide ongoing accountability and advice to implement the recommendations; developing a centralized web platform to serve as a “one-stop shop” for the many stakeholders impacted by oil phase-out; securing ongoing funding to support the worker protection and site remediation recommendations; and advocating for a California Just Transition Fund to support this vision and its many concrete actions.

Now, it is time to take these first steps. Together, we can turn them into significant strides, and continue building the momentum for a clean-energy economy and healthy future for all.



We are optimistic that through the implementation of these strategies, Los Angeles can set up replicable pilot projects that can serve other regions and other sectors. We are counting on our elected leaders and decision-makers to maintain support toward this transformative and equity-based vision, and bring whole-of-government resources to uplift communities and workers in an endeavor that will surely make Los Angeles a more livable and beautiful place.

Just transition is a principle, a process, and a practice. The principle of just transition is that a healthy economy and a clean environment can and should co-exist. The process for achieving this vision should be a fair one that should not cost workers or community residents their health, environment, jobs, or economic assets. Any losses should be fairly compensated. And the practice of just transition means that the people who are most affected by pollution—the frontline workers and the frontline communities—should be in the leadership of crafting policy solutions.

The Just Transition Alliance

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