

MEETING NOTES SUMMARY

Introduction

On September 19th, 2019, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Community Prevention and Population Health Task Force convened stakeholders to obtain feedback on potential strategies for the new Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Environmental Justice Priority Area. Draft strategies were drawn from approved versions of the Los Angeles County and City Sustainability Plans and amended based on feedback gathered through key informant interviews with community-based and grassroots groups, and other stakeholders working on health and health equity efforts. After receiving background information about the CHIP, attendees were invited to participate in a series of breakout groups to provide insight on different categories of CHIP strategies related to the protection of public health near oil and gas operations and discuss related partnerships, projects, and initiatives. Feedback was used, along with other information collected throughout the CHIP community engagement process, to vet and select strategies for inclusion in the CHIP. The CHIP will be released for public comment in early 2020.

Health Protection & Mitigation Strategies

Strategies Discussed

1. Expand the minimum setback distance for oil and gas operations from sensitive land uses to protect the health and safety of the surrounding community.
2. Collaborate with the City of Los Angeles and other local jurisdictions to develop a sunset strategy for all oil and gas operations that prioritizes disproportionately affected communities.
3. Support the implementation of emissions capture and reduction plans including leak detection and repair requirements, implementation of Best Available Retrofit Control Technology, implementation of abatement best practices, as well as potential development of pathways to facility closure.
4. Support local and Statewide effort to eliminate the use of hydrofluoric acid in refineries.

Challenges to advancing strategies

Community-Based & Grassroots Organizations Stakeholders

- Political feasibility for stronger regulation and phase out of oil and gas operations is impacted by power, resources, and influence of the industry and the potential loss of jobs in the sector
- There is diversity of opinions on appropriate setback distance
- Ordinances only apply to a specific jurisdiction and not to neighboring ones
- The Los Angeles City Petroleum Administrator report provides inaccurate cost estimates for implementing setback distances and the setback recommendations are insufficient and confusing
- It is a challenge to include existing oil and gas operations and sites in ordinance changes, including those that would increase setback distances
- There is a narrative that existing scientific literature is insufficient to justify a large setback distance
- There is a misguided belief that we either need a weak setback distance or need more study to justify a larger one
- It is important to ensure that phase out plans include proper capping of wells and clean-up of sites

Industry Stakeholders

- There is a high cost of implementing setbacks distances for oil and gas sites (\$96.7 per oil barrel)
- There is no proven link between health impacts and oil operations
- Because many oil well sites predate housing, houses would have to go if setbacks are introduced
- Local efforts must stay aligned with state authority and local jurisdictions cannot prohibit access to the resource
- If the setbacks are health-based, they would need to be retroactive which means that we cannot build houses or schools in the setback area – it is a land use issue
- Other mitigation strategies could be used besides setbacks
- Cutting off oil will create conflict by cutting off huge reserve of oil production which will lead to an increase of operations in areas that are less regulated, which has political/global implications
- Petroleum is used in many products and all uses would need to be replaced (plastics, hospitals, air travel)
- Ending oil and gas operations in Los Angeles County would result in loss of tax base
- It is impossible and not feasible to sunset all oil and gas in LA
- Ending oil and gas operations will limit diversity of energy options and will cause rate hikes (impacts low income residents most)
- Ending oil and gas operations limits energy security

Opportunities to advance strategies

Community-Based & Grassroots Organizations Stakeholders

- Would be helpful to proactively look into tighter interagency regulation; proposed offices like the Los Angeles County Office of Oil & Gas Administration and Safety Compliance could help to achieve this; interagency Offices and their roles should be shaped through public/community input
- Increase public awareness of the public health impacts of oil and gas operations by engaging in activities such as including education of risks in school science curriculum
- It is important to do community outreach with those living near oil fields and to honor their lived experience
- District representatives should stop accepting money from fossil fuel industry
- New permits and operations should go through review by California's Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) and should be subject to a full interagency review process
- Support STAND-LA's campaign regarding a 2,500-foot buffer; it is a strong coalition
- Look at region-wide policies and ordinances for standardization and consistency, which minimizes cherry-picking of sites by the industry
- Support state bill on setbacks (Assembly Bill 345)
- Use data collected and research conducted in the last decade to inform setback distances
- DPH should make explicit connection between climate change and public health; to demonstrate the urgency of phase out
- Review land use zoning and advocate for changes that will enhance protection of public health
- Ensure that sunset strategies are aligned with timeline for just transition
- Use/mobilize State/City/County legal avenues to address and ensure preparedness for legal fight against regulation and phase out of oil and gas industry
- Look into and potentially replicate approach taken by the City of Culver City in their use of an amortization study to inform the phase out of oil and gas operations
- Leverage and support the health study and periodic review for the Baldwin Hills Community Standards District to inform efforts to regulate and phase out oil and gas operations

- Assembly Bill 1328, a State bill awaiting Governor’s signature, will help provide information through air quality monitoring that may help regulators to make informed policy and oversight decisions
- Utilize state of the art emissions capture equipment, community review, and oversight of data establishing standards to more effectively regulate oil and gas operations
- Pursue a ban on the use of hydrofluoric acid (HF) and modified hydrogen fluoride (MHF) use at refineries

Industry Stakeholders

- The Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning is revising ordinances that regulate oil and gas operations to expand development standards and include more robust protections
- California has the strictest regulations on oil and gas anywhere in the world
- Raise awareness of and educate residents about current regulations and safety measures related to local oil and gas operations
- Address the failure of local electrical systems before eliminating oil and gas
- Prioritize locally sourced oil and gas over imported oil and gas due to the benefits to the environment, economy, jobs, safety
- Ensure that public health resources are prioritized to the issues that threaten lives such as infections, diseases, and sanitation

Data Collection, Monitoring, & Information Sharing Strategies

Strategies Discussed

1. Partner with community-based organizations, school districts, and operators to deploy community and fence-line air monitoring to identify and analyze toxic air contaminants, improve emissions regulations and expand enforcement resources for these regulations. Use CalEnviroScreen or other health equity tools to prioritize deployment of air monitoring in disproportionately affected communities.
2. Conduct an inventory to identify all abandoned and idled oil and gas infrastructure in LA County, prioritize those by condition and proximity to sensitive populations and develop and implement a closure plan that includes identification of potential funding sources.
3. Require oil and gas facility operators to prepare and make available to the public a comprehensive Community Safety Plan, in coordination with the local community as well as City and County departments. Plans should be enforceable and specific to the unique needs of the community. Plans should include operations information, including chemicals used, operation times, and planned maintenance schedules, as well as health and safety information to guide community member efforts to protect themselves from ongoing exposure as well as acute exposure during emergencies.

Challenges to advancing strategies

Community-Based & Grassroots Organizations Stakeholders

- Strategies in this category are not sufficiently specific/actionable
- In data reports or health studies related to the impact of oil and gas operations, there is often a lack of contextualization of findings using resident lived experience and self-reports of health impacts
- There is strong resistance to increased regulation by powerful/political forces; data is available, but regulators not leveraging it to develop recommendations and/or to develop health protective policy
- There are gaps in available data due to data being collected and disseminated in different formats; standardization of monitoring, reporting, and data dissemination is needed
- DPH should advocate for use of the precautionary principle to limit ongoing harm and engage in more data collection and monitoring
- Some data is self-reported or estimated or is not representative; regulators need to look at consistency and validity of data

- There is a lack of funding for enforcement activities for oil and gas operations
- Regulators need the ability to take stronger and more decisive action when data indicates that the operator is out of compliance with regulations
- There is a need to collect more data, but not delay intervention and policy change while data is collected
- Data should be easily accessible and shared in formats and language that are easy for the public to understand
- There are “ghost wells” buried under ground; high tech equipment and funding is needed to find them
- There is a gap in funding for finding and appropriately capping wells and cleaning up oil and gas sites

Industry Stakeholders

- It is challenging to accurately identify the source of emissions
- It is challenging to identify sources of funding for data collection, ongoing monitoring, as well as the capping of wells and site clean up
- There are two statewide monitoring programs – Study of Neighborhood Air near Petroleum Sources (SNAPS) and Assembly Bill 617; additional efforts are duplicative
- Local efforts should include South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) in enforcement to make sure process has teeth and follows state laws
- Apply current air monitoring to other County facilities that impact air quality (Assembly Bill 617, SNAPS)
- All efforts to regulate the oil and gas industry should consider potential litigation costs
- There is a need for an agency that can enforce safety plans and other potential regulations/policies

Opportunities to advance strategies

Community-Based & Grassroots Organizations Stakeholders

- It would be helpful to connect data collection and monitoring strategies to specific health protection interventions and policy change
- Partner with schools, libraries, and other community sites to monitor air quality
- Can DPH mitigate the risks of secondary recovery?
- Challenges of identifying funding data monitoring, regulation enforcement, and clean up should be approached using a reparations framework
- Additional funds are needed to support current air quality projects and health studies, such as the Baldwin Hills Community Standards District health study and periodic review
- Leverage California Air Resources Board-SNAPS and Assembly Bill 617 efforts to expand local data monitoring efforts
- It would be helpful to use data in educational and health communication materials that are accessible to the public and easy to understand (translated into multiple languages, etc.)
- In order to hold operators accountable for more regular and accurate reporting, the County could convene an inter-agency task force to ensure effective inter-agency oversight
- Increase public access to data and information that show health impacts to generate meaningful health studies and peer-reviewed studies
- DPH should expand its capacity to take on an expanded role in oversight of oil and gas operations and a clear role in permitting for oil and gas facilities
- Explore alternative land uses that are healthy, community serving, planning led by community to transform phased out oil and gas sites
- Explore opportunities for County Counsel, City of Los Angeles attorney to deploy legal resources to extract data, get court orders, and enforce regulations
- Create a prioritization matrix to look at cost effective and best practices to inform the data monitoring, reporting, and sharing conducted by community groups and government agencies

- Community groups should work with AQMD and other agencies to increase the use self-collected and self-reported data
- County should use safety plans as a way of requiring operators to fully disclose operations information, including type and amount of chemicals used in their operations
- The community surrounding operations should be notified quickly when acute exposures such as leaks, spills, and explosions, occur
- Community Safety Plans need to be community-specific and relevant to the sensitive receptors and unique topography of the area
- DPH should work with community partners to offer educational information and community safety classes regarding the health risks associated with oil and gas operations
- Leverage the current efforts of the Los Angeles County Oil & Gas Strike Team to identify idle/abandoned wells to create metrics for wells with the highest health and safety risks in unincorporated areas
- Leverage DOGGR initiative to cap wells to support local capping and cleanup efforts

Industry Stakeholders

- Prioritize funding and monitoring efforts based on California’s greenhouse gas emissions
- Explore how to meet the energy needs of residents in the most sustainable way possible ensuring that systems are in place to support health
- Los Angeles County should engage and partner with the oil and gas industry to develop solutions
- Los Angeles County should educate residents on existing safety measures to alleviate fears of negative impacts of oil and gas operations
- Data collection and monitoring should focus on industries other than oil and gas

Just & Equitable Transition to a Cleaner Economy Strategies

Strategies Discussed

1. Collaborate with local jurisdictions, unions, community-based organizations, education institutions, and the private sector to develop a Just Transition plan and task force that examines the impact of the transition to a cleaner economy on disadvantaged workers, identifies strategies for supporting displaced workers, and develops recommendations for ensuring inclusive employment practices within growth sectors of the clean economy.
2. Partner with community-based organizations, educational institutions, unions, and the private sector to develop, connect and place workers within high quality apprenticeship programs, meaningful on-the-job training, and employment opportunities with employers within growth sectors of the clean economy.
3. Complete development and initiate implementation of the County of Los Angeles’ Green Zones Program in the unincorporated areas.
4. Support policies and programs that expand zero-emission vehicle infrastructure and promote equitable access and affordability.
5. Study and implement best practices to maximize program enrollment and benefits in low-income rate assistance, energy efficiency and conservation and clean energy rebate and incentive programs, including proactive strategies to include: renters; people with disabilities; undocumented immigrants; people with limited English proficiency; and other communities traditionally left out of those programs.

Challenges to advancing strategies

Community-Based & Grassroots Organizations Stakeholders

- It may be difficult to bring diverse stakeholders together due to skepticism and disparate agendas
- Effective collaborative efforts require lots of resources (time, money, staffing)

- Efforts would need to recognize history of environmental racism and environmental injustices
- There is limited access to high quality training and apprenticeship programs
- There needs to be an effort to address fears regarding moving away from oil and gas and efforts to educate and incentivize workers
- Los Angeles County needs to identify a source of funds for rate assistance and rebate programs
- There is a need to expand partnerships for rate assistance and rebate programs

Industry Stakeholders

- Transition will cause oil and gas to be imported from abroad which will result in increased costs and less stringent environmental production standards for the resources we import
- Government infrastructure is preventing actions that can be taken for a cleaner economy
- Lower income communities are impacted the most by the deprioritization of local production
- Clean energy is not currently cost effective
- Funding is needed to support the transition to cleaner energy, including for those who need to make improvements to their homes to use clean energy
- Zero emission vehicle manufacturing is not a zero-emission process

Opportunities to advance strategies

Community-Based & Grassroots Organizations Stakeholders

- Developers and implementers of the CHIP should make explicit connections across all oil and gas strategy categories to ensure that efforts are coordinated
- It will be important to develop a clear definition of just transition
- Expanding voices/seats at the table in the transition planning process will lead to increased impact; those that are responsible for convening partners should provide space for workers/communities to generate solutions and collaboration should occur across jurisdictions
- Los Angeles County should weigh in on and learn from State just transition feasibility study
- There is a need to develop a transition plan for workers in the fossil fuel industry
- The transition plan should be developed with a broad set of workers and communities at the table
- Explore mechanisms to fund the transition plan, including funds generated from oil and gas industry
- Funding for just transition should cover the costs of cleaning up oil and gas sites and early retirement for workers in the fossil fuel industry
- Continue pursuing policy that supports phase out while generating funds and developing transition plans
- Engage Los Angeles County workforce development and regional planning entities in just transition planning process
- Explore shifting workers from oil and gas production to producing high-value plastics/plastic pre-cursors
- Los Angeles County should promote clean alternatives via local energy grid, community choice programs
- There is a need to build awareness regarding existing rate assistance and rebate programs
- Incentivize the development and use of green public transit

Industry Stakeholders

- Prioritize local production over imported oil and gas to promote local jobs and contribute to tax base
- Explore opportunities to diversify energy supply and build resilient energy infrastructure locally
- The transition to clean energy sources overnight is not possible, but slower phase in is possible
- Explore opportunities to expand job opportunities in other energy source areas