

Uncertainty as Moratorium on Oil Drilling Expires

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County and also mandatory for expansion of the oil wells, was drafted based on an ordinance crafted by PXP.

The document, titled the PXP Community Standards District, outlines the plans the company has for installing the new wells while conforming to certain environmental regulations.

Kuechle said that with PXP's name attached to the standards, the document will always tend to be more favorable toward the oil company, no matter how many mitigations are imposed.

"When the ordinance is drafted by the oil drilling company in the first place, it is a process that just isn't going to lead to a good result," he said.

While drafting their own ordinance, Kuechle and his neighbors looked at policies that seemed to work for other communities that had oil wells.

It is in these aspects that their standards greatly differ from the ones proposed by PXP, he said.

One example he pointed out was the solution PXP offered to implement if a gas leakage like the one in 2006 occurred again.

According to the EIR, a special type of portable flayer would be sent to the source of the leak where the escaping gas would be burned.

But Kuechle said the EIR does not go much beyond that and does not offer an analysis in terms of the consequences of burning the gas.

For his set of community standards, he and his neighbors adopted a position that goes against the burning of gas, based on a similar ban on the practice expressed by Ventura County.

"We found that a great many cities and counties expressly prohibit burning gas that comes out of oil wells," he said. "Burning the gas hurts the air quality."

Kuechle said another difference between his set of community standards and PXP's is the efforts he and his peers made toward implementing practices that would not require an emergency procedure.

"We adopted the approach that many other counties did," he said. "Instead of telling oil field operators how to solve the problem, we will tell them to make sure they don't let happen."

A PXP representative did not return calls seeking comment.

Another grievance Kuechle cited was EIR's failure to address the threat gas leakages from the new pumps may have on local schools.

An overhead map of the Culver Crest and Baldwin Hills area on page 15 of section 4.2 of the EIR shows the neighborhoods and streets that would be immediately affected by a gas leak highlighted in red, with spots that would be less affected highlight-

ed in yellow.

But after obtaining the original version of the image from L.A. County, Kuechle said, he realized that the image used in the EIR had been cropped, and along with it, a number of Culver City Schools that fall within the yellow-highlighted area.

Kuechle said the schools that could be prone to exposure from a gas leak include Culver City High School and Middle School, El Rincon Elementary and Farragut Elementary.

"That's one of the many outrageous problems with the EIR," Kuechle said.

John Pierson, principal of Marine Research Specialists, the outside source that helped craft the EIR, said the image Kuechle is talking about was not specifically cropped for section 4.2, but instead was the baseline image used for the entire EIR.

He acknowledged that the size of the image could have been ad-

justed.

"It should have been a larger map," Pierson said.

Despite his concerns, the EIR outlined 69 mitigation measures for PXP to execute if granted permission to build new oil wells.

These measures include applying dust suppressants, prohibiting demolition activities when wind speeds exceed 25 mph, and applying chemical soil stabilizers on inactive construction areas, according to the EIR.

Russell Fricano, supervising regional planner for the L.A. County Department of Regional Planning, said the community standards provided by the Greater Baldwin Hills Alliance are still under review and their future is uncertain for now.

Despite Kuechle's and his peers' concerns about the EIR, Fricano said nothing has been finalized, and that other factors will be taken into consideration when the EIR arrives at its first

round of voting with the Regional Planning Commission in late August.

"The commission will hear testimony from the public, our recommendations and the EIR," he said. "Then the commission will make its final decision."

Until that date, a number of informal meetings are expected to be held, at which PXP representatives and L.A. County officials will be present to engage in a dialogue with local residents.

"We're planning on showing up at all the meetings and encouraging our neighbors to do the same," Kuechle said. "We're going to be putting together lengthy comment letters."

Contact Arin Mikailian at amikailian@wavepublication.com.