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Laguna Niguel Homeowner's Opposition to Proposed Compass Energy Storage Project (24-OPT-02)

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March 16, 2025

California Energy Commission
Docket Number: 24-OPT-02
1516 Ninth Street, MS-4
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Opposition to Proposed Compass Energy Storage Project (24-OPT-02)

Dear California Energy Chair and Commissioners,

As a longtime homeowner and resident of Laguna Niguel, I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed Compass Energy Storage Project (24-OPT-02). This project aims to construct a 250-megawatt battery energy storage system (BESS) on a 13-acre site in San Juan Capistrano, adjacent to residential communities in Laguna Niguel. Given the recent catastrophic wildfires in California, approving this project poses significant risks to our community.

The dangers of lithium-ion battery storage fires are well-documented and catastrophic, as seen in recent fires in Pacific Palisades and Altadena, which required massive emergency response efforts to contain.

These incidents highlight a crucial fact: Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) are fundamentally incompatible with wildfire-prone zones like ours.

1. BESS Fire Hazards: Beyond Control

The proposed project relies on lithium-iron phosphate (LFP) batteries, which pose serious fire and explosion risks due to thermal runaway—a chain reaction that rapidly spreads uncontrollable fires.

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Dear California Energy Commissioners,

As a **longtime homeowner and resident of Laguna Niguel**, I write to express my **strong opposition** to the proposed Compass Energy Storage Project (24-OPT-02). This project aims to construct a **250-megawatt battery energy storage system (BESS)** on a **13-acre site in San Juan Capistrano**, adjacent to **residential communities in Laguna Niguel**. Given the **recent catastrophic wildfires in California**, approving this project poses significant risks to our community.

The dangers of lithium-ion battery storage fires are **well-documented** and **catastrophic**, as seen in **recent fires in Pacific Palisades and Altadena**, which required **massive emergency response efforts** to contain.

These incidents highlight a **crucial fact: Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) are fundamentally incompatible with wildfire-prone zones like ours.**

1. BESS Fire Hazards: Beyond Control

The proposed project relies on **lithium-iron phosphate (LFP) batteries**, which pose **serious fire and explosion risks** due to **thermal runaway**—a chain reaction that rapidly spreads uncontrollable fires.

- **Lithium battery fires burn hotter, longer, and faster** than traditional fires.
- **They cannot be fully extinguished with water** and may **reignite days or weeks later**, as seen in previous lithium-ion battery fire incidents.
- **First responders cannot easily suppress these fires**, forcing them to use a **containment-only approach**—meaning that if a fire spreads beyond the project site, it could **rapidly engulf nearby homes**.

Over the past decade, 23 wildfires have occurred within a 5-mile radius of this proposed project site. Introducing a massive energy storage facility in a fire-prone zone is reckless and irresponsible.

2. Recent Wildfires Highlight BESS Fire Hazards

The **2025 Pacific Palisades and Eaton Fires** serve as stark reminders of the devastating impact of wildfires:

- **Pacific Palisades Fire (January 2025):** This fire became the most destructive in Los Angeles history, burning **16,000 acres** and destroying approximately **6,800 structures**. The rapid spread and intensity of the fire led to the evacuation of approximately **70,000 residents**.
- **Eaton Fire in Altadena (January 2025):** This fire resulted in the destruction of approximately **9,400 structures**, burned 14,021 acres, including homes, schools, and businesses, and tragically claimed **17 lives**. These incidents highlight the **extreme vulnerability** of communities to rapidly spreading fires, especially in areas with dense vegetation and challenging terrains similar to Laguna Niguel.

3. Incompatibility of BESS with Fire-Prone Zones

The proposed BESS facility relies on **lithium-iron phosphate (LFP) batteries**, which, despite being considered safer than other lithium-ion chemistries, still pose significant fire risks:

- **Thermal Runaway:** LFP batteries can experience thermal runaway, leading to fires that are difficult to extinguish and may reignite, posing prolonged threats to surrounding areas.
- **Firefighting Challenges:** Traditional firefighting methods are often ineffective against battery fires, requiring specialized techniques and resources that may not be readily available.

Given the **history of wildfires** in our region, introducing a large-scale BESS facility amplifies the risk to our community.

Beyond fire hazards, the proposed project poses potential environmental and health risks:

4. Water Contamination & Environmental Risks

The **risk extends beyond fire**—this project **endangers local water quality** and **ecological health**.

- When **lithium-ion batteries burn**, they **release toxic gases and chemicals**, including **hydrofluoric acid, cobalt, and nickel**, into the air and water.
- Any attempt to **extinguish a BESS fire with water** will create **contaminated runoff**, introducing **heavy metals into Laguna Niguel's water systems**.
- The project's **close proximity to the Oso and Arroyo Creek waterbeds** threatens to **pollute the San Juan Creek Watershed**, which ultimately **flows into the Pacific Ocean**.
- **Water Contamination:** Fire suppression efforts can lead to contaminated runoff, introducing harmful substances into local water bodies, affecting both human health and local ecosystems.
- **Toxic Emissions:** Fires involving LFP batteries can release toxic gases, including phosphorus oxides, which pose inhalation hazards to residents and first responders.

Allowing this project to proceed **jeopardizes local drinking water sources** and risks **severe ecological damage to the broader Orange County region**.

5. Homeowner Insurance & Economic Consequences

California is already facing a **homeowner's insurance crisis**, with major insurers **refusing to cover high-risk wildfire areas**. Approving a **BESS facility near residential neighborhoods** will undoubtedly **increase insurance premiums**, drive **policy cancellations**, and **decrease property values** for **Laguna Niguel homeowners**.

- **Insurance Challenges:** Major insurers are increasingly reluctant to cover properties in high-risk wildfire areas, leading to higher premiums and policy cancellations.
- **Property Values:** The introduction of a BESS facility could further depress property values in the vicinity due to perceived risks, impacting homeowners' investments.

Conclusion: Reject the Compass Energy Storage Project

The **Compass Energy Storage Project (24-OPT-02)** is a **direct threat** to the **safety, health, and economic stability** of **Laguna Niguel and neighboring communities**. The California Energy Commission has a **responsibility to protect** residents from **avoidable dangers**—and this project **must be rejected**.

I **strongly urge** the Commission to **prioritize public safety over corporate interests** and **deny approval** for this hazardous project.

Please accept this letter as my formal request to receive all updates from all agencies regarding the status of this project.

Sincerely,



Tina G Fontaine

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