

DOCKETED	
Docket Number:	19-ERDD-01
Project Title:	Research Idea Exchange
TN #:	240745
Document Title:	Earthjustice, CEJA, Sierra Club Comments on Pipeline Decommissioning Pilot
Description:	N/A
Filer:	System
Organization:	Earthjustice, CEJA, Sierra Club
Submitter Role:	Public
Submission Date:	12/1/2021 10:58:35 AM
Docketed Date:	12/1/2021

*Comment Received From: Matthew Vespa
Submitted On: 12/1/2021
Docket Number: 19-ERDD-01*

**Earthjustice CEJA Sierra Club Comments on Pipeline
Decommissioning Pilot**

Additional submitted attachment is included below.



Via online submission

December 1, 2021

Docket No. 19-ERDD-01

California Energy Commission
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: Comments on Staff Workshop on Strategic Pathways and Analytics for Tactical Decommissioning of Natural Gas

Earthjustice, the California Environmental Justice Alliance (“CEJA”) and Sierra Club appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the November 17th workshop on the process for developing pilot demonstrations for tactical decommissioning. While we understand the pilots are at their initial stages, workshop presentations were vague as to how community-based organizations (“CBOs”) would be engaged and whether and how benefits of electrification would be communicated as part of community outreach. Partnerships with CBOs should be authentic, with a joint decision-making structure and compensation for CBO outreach. It is also critical the benefits of electrification are accurately communicated to stakeholders. In addition, given SoCalGas’ long-documented history of obstructing electrification, we are concerned that Southern California pilots will be designed to fail. The Commission should actively oversee the Southern California pilots and ensure the independence of partner groups by prohibiting entities that have received financial contributions from SoCalGas in the past three years from project participation.

1. Meaningful Community Outreach Must Include Authentic Partnerships and Just Compensation for Community-Based Organizations.

CEJA has consistently advocated for authentic partnerships between government agencies, like the CEC, and CBOs, to ensure meaningful community engagement. Meaningful community engagement entails ongoing efforts to collaboratively vision and co-design programs through shared decision-making from the very initiation of proposals, as well as fair and adequate funding for CBOs to conduct outreach.

E3’s presentation noted the need to rely on “recognized and respected community-based organizations.”¹ CBOs are “recognized and respected” when they have earned the trust of community members. CBOs earn this trust by consistently advocating with communities and involving community members when a project will thoughtfully consider their needs, vision, and well-being. If utilities and project consultants aim to work with CBOs to conduct community outreach, proponents must demonstrate that they will collaborate with CBOs to incorporate their feedback and implement their suggestions as they develop the project together. For example, this could include creating a joint decision-making structure with CBOs, explicitly granting CBOs autonomy over outreach methods, and holding workshops and informational sessions with spoken and written language access features for community members.

An especially important way that proponents can demonstrate a commitment to meaningful community outreach is by providing financial resources. At the CEC workshop, neither project group mentioned whether project funding was available for CBO outreach. The outreach work that CBOs undertake requires not only the standard “billable time” and effort, but also the less-tangible resources that arise from years of trust- and relationship-building activities. CBOs should not have to do any outreach work for proponent-led pilot projects for free. Rather, CBOs should work alongside project proponents as joint decision-makers, and be justly compensated for their time providing the critical work that is required for a community-based project.

Oftentimes, opportunities for partnerships are presented to CBOs in a transactional way, leading to ineffective outreach. For example, utilities or other groups sometimes issue outreach solicitations to CBOs after dismissing opportunities for communities and developers to work together on projects at their outset. CBOs are unlikely to conduct outreach for a program that has steered far away from what communities envisioned and requested for that program.

Similarly, it is an inefficient use of a CBO’s limited time and resources if outreach requests are meant to advance an entity’s agenda for the sake of checking a box, rather than to commit to a meaningful dialogue, authentic trust-building, and accountability measures between communities and project proponents. CBOs are unlikely to conduct outreach for the sole purpose of satisfying an entity’s purported commitment to considering equity.

Notably, Rand only requested names and job titles of individuals it would “benefit [their] researchers to reach out to.”² Without more information as to how Rand will seriously consider community input during project development, and how CBO involvement would also benefit the community, CBOs are unlikely to provide such contact information. CBOs do tremendous work in building trust within the communities they work with, as well as with other CBOs. This work should not be taken for granted.

2. The Health, Climate, Comfort, Efficiency and Air Quality Benefits of Electrification Should Be Communicated and Accurately Conveyed to Stakeholders.

¹ Nov. 17, 2021, Workshop, E3 Slides, Slide 7.

² Nov. 17, 2021, Workshop, Rand Slides, Slide 19.

The CEC must ensure that outreach includes education on the benefits of electrification. Particularly given the decades of marketing from the gas industry depicting gas as “natural,” community stakeholders may not be aware “natural gas” is methane, is a highly potent greenhouse gas, and results in air pollution and health impacts when combusted. Community members may also not be aware of heat pump technology and its superior efficiency to gas alternatives or the speed and accuracy of induction cooking compared to gas stoves. Outreach that does not provide this information can skew outcomes and reinforce the status quo of continued reliance on polluting appliances.

Sources of information on electrification and the impacts of continued gas reliance include the following:

- California Air Resources Board, Resolution No. 20-32, California Indoor Air Quality Program Update, recognizing “the conclusion of recent studies that 100 percent electrification of natural gas appliances in California would result in significant health benefits and reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from natural gas combustion in residential buildings” and that “residents of DACs tend to suffer disproportionate health impacts due to heightened exposure to unhealthy levels of indoor air quality in low income communities, as well as other inequities that increase health vulnerabilities of residents.”³
- Brady Seals & Andee Krasner, *Health Effects From Gas Stove Pollution*, finding that homes with gas stoves can have NO_x concentrations 50 to 400 percent higher than those with electric ones, with children in homes with gas stoves particularly at risk for adverse health effects.⁴
- Energy and Environmental Economics (“E3”), *Residential Building Electrification in California*, finding that “electrification is found to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions in single family homes by approximately 30 to 60 percent in 2020, relative to a natural gas-fueled home” and “[a]s the carbon intensity of the grid decreases over time, these savings are estimated to increase to approximately 80 to 90 percent by 2050, including the impacts of upstream methane leakage and refrigerant gas leakage from air conditioners and heat pumps.”⁵
- U.S. Dep’t of Energy, *Heat Pump Systems*, noting that “[h]eat pumps offer an energy-efficient alternative to furnaces and air conditioners for all climates” and that “[h]igh-

³ California Air Resource Board, Resolution 20-32, California Indoor Air Quality Program Update (Nov. 19, 2020), <https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/board/res/2020/res20-32.pdf>.

⁴ Brady Seals & Andee Krasner, *Health Effects From Gas Stove Pollution*, at 11, RMI (2020), <https://rmi.org/insight/gas-stoves-pollution-health>.

⁵ E3, *Residential Building Electrification in California*, at iv (Apr. 2019), https://www.ethree.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/E3_Residential_Building_Electrification_in_California_April_2019.pdf.

efficiency heat pumps also dehumidify better than standard central air conditioners, resulting in less energy usage and more cooling comfort in summer months.”⁶

- Marin Clean Energy’s (“MCE”) Low-Income Families and Tenants Pilot Program Evaluation, finding that switching from gas to electric heat pump space and water heating in low-income rental properties achieved average bill savings of \$128 per year with tenants reporting “indoor air temperature being just right even on very hot days,” better air quality and reduced noise.⁷ Notably, carbon monoxide levels in dwelling units, which had exceeded national health and safety limits, were virtually eliminated.⁸

3. Organizations Accepting Contributions from SoCalGas in the Last Three Years Should Not Be Eligible to Participate in the Pilot Program.

SoCalGas has a well-documented history of opposing electrification through tactics that include forming and financing front-groups, opposing local reach code adoption and improperly using customer money allocated to advocate for strong efficiency codes and standards to instead work to undermine their adoption.⁹ Given this track record, the Commission should oversee and create guardrails to limit SoCalGas’ influence and opportunities to sabotage the pilot process. One way to better ensure independence is to prohibit organizations that have accepted financial contributions from SoCalGas within the last three years from project participation. This is consistent with academic findings that “[a]cross a range of issues and regulatory agencies, researchers and journalists have documented cases of companies using charitable contributions to co-opt ostensibly neutral and even non-aligned non-profits.”¹⁰

Dated: December 1, 2021

⁶ U.S. Dep’t of Energy, *Heat Pump Systems*, <https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/heat-pump-systems> (as of Nov. 30, 2021).

⁷ DNV, MCE Low-Income Families and Tenants Pilot Program Evaluation at 4, 35 (Aug 5, 2021) <https://www.mcecleanenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/MCE-Low-Income-Families-and-Tenants-Pilot-Program-Evaluation.pdf>.

⁸ *Id* at 29.

⁹ *See, e.g.*, LA Times, The fossil fuel industry wants you to believe it’s good for people of color (Nov. 23, 2020), <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2020-11-23/clean-energy-fossil-fuels-racial-justice>; LA Times Editorial, SoCalGas’ sleazy ‘Astroturf’ effort to keep fossil fuels flowing in California (Aug. 10, 2019), <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-08-10/socalgas-astroturf-cpuc-aliso-canyon>; CPUC, R.13-11-005, Presiding Officer’s Decision Ordering Remedies for Southern California Gas Company’s Activities That Misaligned with Commission Intent for Codes and Standards Advocacy at 26 (Apr. 21, 2021) (finding that “SoCalGas committed appreciable harm to the regulatory process by using ratepayer funds in misalignment with the Commission’s intent for codes and standards advocacy.”), <https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Efile/G000/M378/K738/378738145.PDF>.

¹⁰ Marianne Bertrand *et al.*, *Hall of Mirrors: Corporate Philanthropy and Strategic Advocacy*, National Bureau of Economic Research, at 3 (Dec. 2018), https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w25329/w25329.pdf.

Sincerely,

Matt Vespa
Senior Attorney
Earthjustice
mvespa@earthjustice.org

Lauren Cullum
Policy Advocate
Sierra Club California
lauren.cullum@sierraclub.org

Jina Kim
Legal Fellow
California Environmental Justice Alliance
jkim@cbecal.org