

Katherine Douglas

Public Comment

# 3



**From:** Katie Davis <kdavis2468@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 17, 2025 6:08 PM  
**To:** sbcob  
**Subject:** October 21 Agenda Item #2: Oil Phase Out - SUPPORT  
**Attachments:** Sierra Club Oil Phase Out Oct 21.pdf; Phase Out Oil to Protect Our Health and Environment - The Santa Barbara Independent.pdf; CAP Sign On Letter 2025\_May.pdf

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Please see attached:

- Comment letter from the Sierra Club, Santa Barbara-Ventura Chapter
- October 2025 Independent article
- May 2025 sign-on letter



# SIERRA CLUB

SANTA BARBARA-VENTURA CHAPTER

October 17, 2025

Santa Barbara County Supervisors  
105 East Anapamu Street, 4th Floor  
Santa Barbara 93101  
Via email: [sbcob@countyofsb.org](mailto:sbcob@countyofsb.org)

## **RE: October 21 Agenda Item #2: Oil Phase Out - SUPPORT**

Dear Santa Barbara County Supervisors,

The Sierra Club, Santa Barbara-Ventura Chapter supports staff recommendations. We also appreciate their meeting with other jurisdictions engaged in similar efforts to follow the lead of places like Los Angeles that are further along this path. The immediate step to draft an ordinance to prohibit new oil projects makes sense. As we have learned from past proposals, the remaining oil here is heavy and energy-intensive to extract. It is some of the most polluting and expensive oil in the world to produce.

As explained in the attached article, steam oil expansion in the County threatens critical drinking water supplies, requires extensive oil trucking, burns a lot of natural gas, and dramatically increases greenhouse gas emissions and local health-damaging pollution. New oil wells were also proposed in proximity to homes and an elementary school.

It also makes economic sense as the county property tax revenue from oil is minimal (\$1.7M/year), while the public costs of clean-up and decommissioning are high. For example:

- The cost to California taxpayers to plug and abandon 171 HVI Cat Canyon/Greka orphaned wells after their bankruptcy was [\\$36 million](#).
- The cost to California taxpayers to shut down Venoco's operations after an oil spill and bankruptcy was [\\$348 million](#).
- The initial cost to clean up the Casmalia superfund oil waste site was [\\$60 million](#), with \$4.1 million a year in on-going costs.
- The cost to California taxpayers to plug offshore abandoned oil wells off Santa Barbara County beaches is [\\$2 million](#) a year

Prohibiting new oil drilling would keep this problem from getting worse, particularly given that major oil companies have sold local assets to smaller, speculative ventures that are at greater risk of going bankrupt. And it would free up alternate uses and new tax revenue sources for our high-value land, such as housing.

It also makes sense to proceed with an amortization study to inform a phase out of existing oil operations, which are a significant source of pollution as explained in the attached article. The requirement to do an EIR for phase out is based on a questionable reading of the law but may be necessary because of the litigious nature of oil companies.

The science of climate change remains solid and frightening. We are already seeing the deadly impacts locally from increasing wildfires, flooding and heatwaves, and the future will be much worse if we fail to act. With the current federal government retreating from science and climate action, it is all the more important to act locally and ensure that California participates in the global effort to transition off fossil fuels, and that we benefit from building the clean energy economy of the future. We are well on our way. A quarter of new cars sold in California are electric. Gasoline use in California peaked twenty years ago in 2004 and is on a steady decline. California and twenty-three other states have 100% carbon-free electricity goals. California recently compiled data from 2023 and found that 67% of its energy came from renewable sources, breaking the record for the third straight year.

Thank you for taking action and maintaining Santa Barbara County's legacy as an environmental leader.

Regards,



Katie Davis  
Sierra Club, Santa Barbara-Ventura Chapter

Attachments:

- Letter from 50+ organizations supporting Santa Barbara County Oil Phase Out, May 2025
- Article "Phase Out Oil to Protect Our Health and Environment," Santa Barbara Independent, October 2025





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# Phase Out Oil to Protect Our Health and Environment

## Santa Barbara County Will Consider an Oil Phase-Out Plan on October 21



By Katie Davis, Energy Chair, Sierra Club, Santa Barbara-Ventura Chapter  
Tue Oct 14, 2025 | 5:22pm



*Oil production not only causes oil spills but health-damaging air pollutants like tiny particulate matter and carcinogenic volatile organic compounds and benzene. | Credit: Paul Wellman (file)*


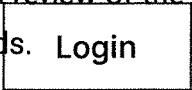
Passage of the county's Climate Action Plan last year prompted a discussion about oil and gas production and the economic, health, and environmental benefits of an oil phase out. On May 13, 2025, Santa Barbara County supervisors voted to phase out oil drilling, which will save lives, reduce air pollution, and help meet our climate goals. Staff will present a phase-out plan on October 21.

Oil production in Santa Barbara County has declined. As a Stanford report explains, "the days of gushers are long gone, leaving behind substantially depleted oil fields containing heavy crude oil, often tucked into folded geology, that is difficult to extract. Today's drillers typically inject steam or hot water into the reservoir to lower the oil's viscosity and increase its flow, a process often fueled by burning natural gas. Those enhancement techniques are energy-intensive and expensive."

Revenues to the county from local oil production are now just \$1.7 million in property taxes or approximately 0.1 percent of county revenues. Compare that to the \$36 million it cost taxpayers to plug 171 orphan wells left behind by HVI Cat Canyon/Greka after their bankruptcy. This risk has increased as oil companies have sold their assets to smaller, speculative ventures that are at higher risk of going bankrupt.

Despite declines, oil production remains a significant source of air pollution. A report found that oil and gas production in 2023 generated 132,356 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO<sub>2</sub>e), which is roughly 11 percent of the estimated 1.2 million MtCO<sub>2</sub>e total tracked in the county Climate Action Plan – more than that contributed by electricity use in buildings.

According to the California Air Resources Board, oil production is also the largest facility source of health-damaging air pollutants such as PM 2.5, a pollutant that can enter people's lungs and bloodstream, leading to increased risk of heart disease, aggravated asthma, diabetes, and premature death; VOCs, which can cause difficulty breathing, damage the central nervous system; and increase cancer risk, and benzene, another known carcinogen. In Santa Barbara County, 40 percent of oil and gas wells are within one mile of sensitive areas such as schools, hospitals, and residential areas.

And it could get worse. Oil projects proposed over the past decade illustrate what could happen if we do not have a phase-out plan in place. In 2016, Santa Barbara County denied Pacific Coast Energy's proposal to drill up to 144 new cyclic steam injection oil wells on Orcutt Hill due to unavoidable impacts to water quality and endangered and sensitive species. The county found that the company's existing steaming operations had resulted in 99 oil seeps requiring emergency permits for capping and controlling the oil see  well-casing failures, and surface heaving and cracks related to steaming. An environmental review of the project concluded that it could cause additional seeps and spills into creeks and watersheds. 

In 2020, several projects totaling 760 oil wells in the Cat Canyon oil field were withdrawn after facing intense opposition. The projects proposed drilling through the Santa Maria Groundwater Basin, the primary source of drinking and agricultural water in northern Santa Barbara County. Each project would have used around 7

million gallons of fresh water per year. The projects required trucking in oil to mix with the tar-like, heavy oil to keep it liquefied, and trucking the combined oil back out again, resulting in hundreds of tanker truck trips on local roads. Trucks spill more than pipelines and have six times the fatality rate. Finally, the energy-intensive form of production would have dramatically increased greenhouse gas emissions in the county, generating 759,968 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e – five times the 2023 oil and gas emissions.

In voting to phase out oil, the majority of supervisors cited the devastating costs of climate disasters, such as the wildfires and Montecito mudslide that killed 23 people, the backsliding and climate denial under the Trump administration that makes local action more urgent, and the health savings and other benefits of phasing out oil pollution near people's homes, businesses and in proximity to critical drinking water supplies.

Just as setting 100 percent renewable energy goals and joining Central Coast Community Energy has allowed Santa Barbara County to participate in a planned and affordable transition to renewable energy, setting a goal to phase out fossil fuel production will help the county plan an orderly transition away from oil and gas.

Consider this: Workers are needed to plug oil wells. According to analyses by RFF and Sierra Club, capping the 2,348 active and idle wells in the county could create between 564 and 1,268 jobs. And landowners and industry can turn to other productive uses for their land, such as housing or renewable energy projects, instead of costly proposals that conflict with county efforts to protect our air, water, health, and climate.

To support the oil phase out plan, email the supervisors at [clerk@countyofsb.org](mailto:clerk@countyofsb.org) before October 21.

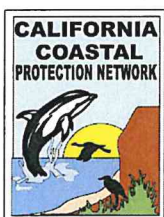
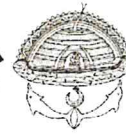
Fri Oct 17, 2025 | 18:47pm

<https://www.independent.com/2025/10/14/phase-out-oil-to-protect-our-health-and-environment/>

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May 8, 2025

Santa Barbara County Supervisors  
105 East Anapamu Street, 4th Floor  
Santa Barbara 93101  
Via email: [sbcob@countyofsb.org](mailto:sbcob@countyofsb.org)

**RE: May 13, Agenda Item #8: Options to address emissions from Oil & Gas Operations**

Dear Santa Barbara County Supervisors,

Thank you for passing the Climate Action Plan ("CAP") on August 27, 2024, which outlines actions we can take to help meet the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030. Thank you also for recognizing the omission of oil and gas facilities from the CAP and passing the RESOLUTION – OIL AND GAS ACTIONS, asking staff to return with options for including oil and gas facilities.

The only way to reduce emissions in this sector is to not allow new oil and gas projects, and to begin the process of phasing out oil and gas facilities once they have been fully amortized and their investments have been recouped. We urge you to take the next step and ask staff to return with an oil and gas phase out ordinance.

Just as setting 100% renewable energy goals and joining Central Coast Community Energy has allowed Santa Barbara County (the "County") to participate in a planned and affordable transition to renewable energy, setting a goal to phase out fossil fuel production will help the County plan an orderly transition away from oil and gas, provide landowners and industry with certainty, and head off costly project proposals that conflict with County efforts to protect our air, water, health, and climate.

**1. Fixes the loophole:** Our CAP should be both ambitious and accurate. As the UN's International Panel on Climate Change [reports](#), "The evidence is clear: the time for action is now. We can halve emissions by 2030...The next few years are critical." At this critical juncture, continuing to exclude and ignore a major greenhouse gas emissions source in the County is unacceptable. Including oil and gas facilities in our County's CAP also improves its compliance with CEQA, as explained by [Carstens, Black & Minter](#).

**2. Limits the most climate-damaging oil production:** The oil projects that have been proposed in the County over the past decade have been cyclic steam or steam flooding proposals, which are the most energy-intensive forms of oil production. The carbon intensity (which measures the full carbon cost including production, transportation and refining) is higher than the average oil imported from around the globe. The carbon intensity of California-sourced oil is growing [at three times the rate](#) of oils produced outside of



California. The unconventional oil left in the County is particularly harmful to the environment and should be phased out first.

**3. Improves air quality and health outcomes:** Diesel trucks and gas-burning steam generators not only produce greenhouse gases, but they also emit health-damaging air pollution that causes cancer, asthma, heart disease, and other conditions. For instance, according to the [California Air Resources Board](#), oil production was the largest facility source of PM2.5, Benzene, Formaldehyde, VOCs, Nitrogen Oxide and Sulfur Oxide in the County in recent years. Phasing out oil will save lives.

**4. Improves the safety of our drinking water supplies:** Many oil projects are in the vicinity of critical drinking water aquifers. For instance, oil companies are currently seeking an exemption from federal drinking water protections in Cat Canyon to inject toxic wastewater below the Santa Maria Groundwater Basin, which provides drinking water to 190,000 people. A state study identified 291 existing wells that may serve as pathways for the migration of toxic substances in that field. In addition, there have been documented oil spills into [creeks](#), [rivers](#) and [watersheds](#), and a [superfund](#) site. Page 50 of that EPA plan notes that, "Cleanup of groundwater in this area is technically impracticable and would likely require several thousand years."

**5. Improves road safety and trucking accidents:** Due to the Phillip 66 refinery closure, trucking is increasingly used to transport oil. Recent proposals have included adding thousands of additional oil tanker truck trips annually to local roads. [Oil tanker accidents](#) have created hazardous traffic, shut down roads, and have caused fires and spilled oil into waterways.

**6. Safeguards wildlife and endangered species:** Oil production kills and harms endangered and sensitive plants and animal species. The Central Coast's Mediterranean biome is a hotspot of biodiversity. The region contains numerous endemic, federally-listed, and sensitive species which require protection.

**7. Prevents disasters:** Oil projects are located in high fire hazard zones and increase [wildfire risks](#). Additionally, wastewater injections can [trigger earthquakes](#). Phasing out oil will help prevent future natural disasters from wreaking havoc.

**8. Saves resources:** Per the UCSB report on the benefits of an oil phase out, revenues to the County from local oil production (just \$3.3 million in property taxes or approximately 0.2% of county revenues) are low relative to some other land uses while costs to the County (accounting, legal, road repair, emergency services, etc.) are higher than other industries.

Other jurisdictions including the city and county of Los Angeles have already passed oil phase out ordinances, and such actions have been further facilitated by the passage of [AB 3233](#) last year clarifying the right of local jurisdictions to regulate oil. Health and safety

regulation has long been the responsibility of local governments. The City of Santa Barbara has [prohibited oil drilling](#) for at least 60 years.

We urge you to direct staff to research and draft an appropriate and legally defensible oil and gas phase out plan and ordinance.

Regards,

Maureen Ellenberger  
Chair  
Sierra Club Santa Barbara-Ventura Chapter

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Youth v. Oil Intern  
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Vicki Allen  
VP Communications  
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North America Regional Representative  
Sustainable Ocean Alliance

Tevin Schmitt  
Watershed Scientist  
Wishtoyo Foundation

Mia Lopez; Chumash, Coastal Band Member  
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Hans Cole  
VP - Environmental Activism  
Patagonia

Dennis Allen  
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