



Our Children's Earth Foundation | 100 First Street, Suite 100-367, San Francisco, CA 94105

NEWS RELEASE

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CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION'S FAST-TRACKING OF POWER PLANTS SACRIFICES HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE OF LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

SACRAMENTO --- On Wednesday, November 14, 2001, the California Energy Commission (CEC) will meet in Sacramento to consider whether to continue to license power plants under fast-track provisions of Governor Davis' emergency executive orders that effectively eliminated health and environmental protection procedures from the power plant licensing process. A coalition of health, environmental, and community groups will testify to demand that the CEC not continue this unhealthy, unjust and unnecessary licensing process, as conservation and wholesale price caps have proven to be the best short-term measures for addressing the energy crisis. The CEC meeting will begin at 10:00 AM. Coalition representatives will be in attendance at 1516 Ninth Street, First Floor, Hearing Room A, and will be available beforehand for comments.

Governor Davis' fast-track procedures were created during the throes of what was perceived as an energy supply crisis. The Governor "streamlined" the power plant licensing process by removing public health protection and public participation procedures required by federal and state law. Governor Davis' executive orders also created incentives, such as a million dollar bonus, taken from parks and recreation funds, for power plant operators who could get plants on-line rapidly. "Such crisis planning is wasteful of taxpayer's money, environmentally devastating, and is especially inappropriate now that the state is selling surplus energy at a loss," said Enrique Gallardo of Latino Issues Forum.

The CEC's and Governor's fast-track policies are expediting the construction of simple-cycle 'peaker' power plants. These inefficient plants are typically twice as polluting as combined cycle 'base load' plants, and are permitted to run all year as if they were base load plants. Air pollution from power plants hurts everyone, but especially certain populations. "We cannot place the health of California's most vulnerable populations, children, the elderly and low-income communities of color, at risk with short sighted energy policies that benefit the energy companies," said Martha Arguello of Physicians for Social Responsibility. Tiffany Schauer, founder of Our Children's Earth agrees. "It is alarming that the CEC would be willing to circumvent existing laws, with no concern for the impact on our children," she said.

Low-income communities and communities of color, already overburdened by many sources of pollution, are overwhelmingly the sites for proposed power plants. A new study

commissioned by Latino Issues Forum, "Power Against the People: Moving Beyond Crisis Planning in California Energy Policy" (available at www.lif.org), studied proposed power plants for which precise location data was available during the summer of 2001. Of 18 proposed power plants analyzed, 16 of them were located in areas where 50% or more of the population were people of color. For 15 of the 18 power plants, the average yearly household income in the area surrounding the plant was less than \$25,000, much lower than the state average. These findings raise serious concerns about the 31 peaker power plant projects that have signed letters of intent with the newly created California Power Authority. "The Governor should invest State funds in providing much needed schools, parks and improving health facilities for low-income communities of color instead of paying power plant developers to pollute our already overburdened communities," said Marta A. Segura of Communities for a Better Environment.

Most frustrating regarding the Governor's and the CEC's response to the "energy crisis," is the State's failure to place adequate emphasis on cost-effective and environmentally sound solutions to power supply problems. Conservation and efficiency improvements, and quickly installed renewables such as wind-powered generators can create an adequate reserve of energy supply quickly and cost-effectively. "The CEC's fast-tracking of power plants is putting the health of already burdened communities at risk, while further deepening California's dependence on fossil-fuel burning plants. California needs to get on track toward maximizing the use of conservation and renewables" said Paula Forbis of the Environmental Health Coalition.

The coalition of community, environmental and health groups has called for the following actions:

- The CEC must discontinue the streamlined licensing procedures and uphold the federal and state laws that were put in place to protect public health and the environment.
- The Governor must rescind his emergency executive orders. Only the most efficient and clean power plants should be sited with full environmental review and consideration of environmental justice.
- There must be a moratorium on siting power plants in any community that is already overburdened with pollution.
- The state should pursue conservation and renewables to the maximum extent possible, and should prevent manipulation of energy supplies perpetrated by power producers by ensuring adequate public oversight of the energy industry and market.

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