

Delay California's oil drilling protections until 2031? No way

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Communities across California, from Los Angeles to the San Joaquin Valley, have fought for more than a decade to stop oil companies from

drilling in their neighborhoods and spewing health-damaging pollution into the air.

The passage of a landmark state law in 2022 to ban new drilling within 3,200 feet of homes, schools, child care centers and hospitals and establish new health protections for existing wells seemed to be the victory they sought. They never imagined it might take nearly another decade for it to take full effect.

Yet that's exactly what Gov. Gavin Newsom's office has proposed in the closing days of this year's legislative session. The law was already delayed a year and a half when the oil industry filed a referendum against the law and then withdrew it from the November ballot. Now the administration wants to extend various oil industry compliance deadlines in the law.

As written, the law gives operators of wells near homes and schools until the end of this year to submit leak detection and response plans to state regulators, and until the end of 2026 to implement them. Newsom's proposal would extend those deadlines until July 1, 2029, and July 1, 2031, respectively, among other delays.

Forcing communities that have already faced one obstacle after another to wait years longer for oil companies to fully comply with requirements designed to protect the public from their pollution is unreasonable and wrong.

No more delays. Legislators should reject the Newsom administration's last-minute proposal. The more than 2 million Californians who live within 3,200 feet of oil wells and are at increased risk of cancer and other health problems deserve relief now.

For years, the oil industry used its lobbying power in Sacramento to beat

back lawmakers' efforts to ban new oil wells and protect Californians from the health impacts of existing drilling operations.

In 2021, Gov. Newsom announced that his administration would act without the Legislature to impose drilling restrictions, but the rulemaking went so slowly that it took a new law to finally make it happen.

The law's ban on new drilling near homes and schools went back into effect immediately after the referendum was pulled in June. But under Newsom's proposal, oil companies would get more than four additional years to meet the law's requirements to monitor and repair leaks from existing wells.

"Leaks" is an understatement: Drilling operations are spewing cancer-causing benzene and other dangerous pollutants into the lungs of kids and adults who live, work or attend school nearby, and that needs to stop.

An 18-month delay would at least be understandable. That's about how long the law was suspended due to the oil industry-backed referendum, and should be enough for state agencies tasked with implementing the law to get back on track. But they don't need four-plus years.

"It does seem like a benefit to the industry and it seems like a detriment to the public," Assemblymember Rick Chavez Zbur (D-Los Angeles) said at a committee hearing last week. "This is delaying by many years without any kind of policy oversight."

Though oil companies will be the primary beneficiaries of these delays, Newsom administration officials have insisted it is necessary to give state agencies more time to hire staff and prepare for implementing the law properly. The governor's office said it did not cut any deal with the oil industry in exchange for abandoning the referendum.

We hope that the delay attempt doesn't signal a broader retreat from tough and urgent climate action by the governor. His office said he is not backing away from his commitment to transition the state off fossil fuels, but it isn't the only example.

The governor on Monday delivered a head-scratching veto of a bill to improve the monitoring, reporting and public notification about oil refinery air pollution, saying that local air quality management districts, which supported the legislation, were already doing enough to protect communities.

The administration has also sought a two-year delay for compliance with two important environmental laws Newsom signed last year that require big companies doing business in California to disclose their [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and climate-related risk.

Assembly and Senate lawmakers should reject anything but minimal [delays](#) to such important climate and public health protections. Postponing compliance deadlines is not harmless.

Living near oil and gas wells is linked to asthma, preterm births and reductions in lung function on par with living near a freeway or with secondhand smoke. The public suffers ongoing health effects with each delay the fossil fuel industry is granted.

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