



OPINIONATED: Go Back to Aliso Canyon Deal Drawing Board

By V. John White

Three years ago, Aliso Canyon was home to the largest methane leak in U.S. history, resulting in dozens of hospitalizations, the release of more than 100,000 tons of potent GHG emissions, and the evacuation of more than 10,000 families.

Earlier this month, the state attorney general and California Air Resources Board proposed a settlement to a lawsuit against the facility's owner, the Southern California Gas Company. Unfortunately, with this settlement, state leaders have squandered an opportunity to protect local residents from future health hazards, and missed a chance to move California closer to meeting its long-term climate goals.

In addition to the longer-term health and climate impacts of the leak, California ratepayers are literally paying the price. The economic cost of the leak has topped \$1 billion, and the continuing safety and reliability issues with Aliso Canyon and the Southern California natural gas pipeline system have resulted in price spikes for both natural gas and electricity customers.

The settlement is unbalanced, unfair, and also unwise.

It allows SoCal Gas to "mitigate" the huge environmental damage caused by Aliso's catastrophic gas leak by incorporating so-called "renewable methane" from dairies into their pipeline system. While capturing dairy methane and putting it to environmentally sustainable use has merit, it has nothing to do with Aliso Canyon, or how to ensure residents' health and safety will be protected going forward.

The settlement will not advance Gov. Jerry Brown's directive to phase out natural gas storage at Aliso Canyon over the next decade, and fails to provide any additional protections for local residents and ratepayers.

It's been a year since the governor called for a plan to close the storage facility at Aliso Canyon, but thus far the California Public Utilities Commission has lacked a sense of urgency in getting this done.

The settlement was a missed opportunity for the Governor to demand the utility take concrete action to ensure the facility will be closed, and that the residents of Porter Ranch and the surrounding communities are protected. They should start by phasing out Aliso Canyon for high volumes of natural gas storage, and limit its use to reliability balancing.

The state should go back to the negotiating table and demand a better deal.

A more equitable settlement would include provisions to reduce natural gas demand, accelerate energy efficiency and cool pavements and roofs, and incorporate safety measures to ensure accidents like this can never happen again.

Brown also should show that he is serious about phasing out Aliso Canyon by directing the Air Board and his energy agencies to prioritize planning and preparation for the rapid, orderly phase out of Aliso Canyon, and reducing Southern California's dependence on natural gas.

The Aliso Canyon disaster underscores the dangers of California's continued dependence on natural gas and other fossil-fuel based electricity. It is bad for the environment, and a danger to those who live, work and play near these storage facilities.

Brown has been a global leader in moving toward a future with more clean, cheap renewable energy. He should back up that image with a settlement that puts teeth into California's lofty climate goals, and offers real safeguards and protections for California residents and ratepayers.

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