

# SoCalGas Plans to Expand Ventura Compressor Station

**Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas), the nation's largest natural gas distribution utility and the culprit behind the massive Aliso Canyon gas leak, is seeking to expand a compressor station in Ventura, California.<sup>1</sup> This polluting infrastructure is located in an already overburdened community and is next to an elementary school and a Boys & Girls Club.<sup>2</sup> Upgrading and expanding the site will put the community at increased risk.**

## Compressor Stations Put Communities at Risk

Compressor stations are facilities built within the natural gas pipeline network that maintain the pressure of the gas being transported through the pipelines.<sup>3</sup>

Compressor stations are detrimental to the environment and surrounding communities, periodically emitting high levels of the potent greenhouse gas methane and significant quantities of nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>), fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), carbon monoxide, benzene and formaldehyde — which pollute nearby communities. NO<sub>x</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> contribute to respiratory health problems and heart disease, and reduce life expectancy.<sup>4</sup>

Compressor stations also pose safety risks and are prone to rupture, leakage, fire and explosions. Accidents and explosions have killed and injured workers, closed highways and shaken homes within a half mile of explosions,<sup>5</sup> raising concerns for the residents living near the SoCalGas compressor station in Ventura (see Figure 1). Approximately 500 people live within a quarter mile of the facility, and over 400 children are enrolled in the neighboring school — 88 percent of whom identify as Latino. Roughly 4,750 people live within a half mile of the facility and could be impacted by an accident at the facility.<sup>6</sup>

**FIG. 1: Area surrounding Ventura compressor station**



Compressor stations are loud, raising noise levels inside nearby homes even at night. This noise pollution is a hazard to health and quality of life, and can cause sleep deprivation; noise exposure above 70 decibels can cause hearing problems, hypertension and ischemic heart disease.<sup>7</sup> SoCalGas compressor stations already have a history of disturbing neighbors: complaints of vibrations from residents in mobile homes near the La Goleta storage facility forced the company to install foundation supports on several homes.<sup>8</sup>

Nearly 13,000 people — mostly low-income and people of color — live within a mile of the Ventura compressor station.<sup>9</sup> Expanding the compressor station is an environmental injustice that would increase pollution in a community (census tract) that is 71 percent Hispanic and is experiencing high poverty rates, low educational attainment, and increased asthma and cardiovascular disease. This community already faces a disproportionate pollution burden from pesticides, groundwater contamination and hazardous waste.<sup>10</sup>

## SoCalGas Plans Expansion

SoCalGas seeks to expand its Ventura compressor station by installing another four compressor engines at the station.<sup>11</sup> The site must first undergo remediation due to contamination from the previous manufactured gas plant. The various chemicals found in the soil and soil vapors — including polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, arsenic, lead and volatile organic compounds — can cause cancer, impact the nervous system and affect reproductive health, among other concerns.<sup>12</sup>

The cleanup plan, already approved by California’s Department of Toxic Substances Control, will only replace some of the contaminated soil and will draw over 200 diesel-fueled truck trips through the community.<sup>13</sup> SoCalGas still needs approval from the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District (VCAPCD) before building out the compressor station.<sup>14</sup>

SoCalGas has a troubled record. The company already operates three natural gas compressor engines at the Ventura site that have led to several complaints of odors and natural gas releases, even causing a local business to evacuate after workers experienced headaches and burning in their eyes and throats. In 2016, the company was fined for inadequate work practices during asbestos removal.<sup>15</sup> And in 2019, NASA scientists identified the facility as a potential “super-emitter” of the potent greenhouse gas methane.<sup>16</sup>

SoCalGas also has a history of leaks and violations beyond the Ventura site, including the largest natural gas blowout

in the United States that released roughly 100,000 metric tons of methane and other harmful pollutants from its Aliso Canyon storage facility in October 2015.<sup>17</sup> Over the next eight months, more than 8,000 families living within five miles of the blowout fled their homes, and two schools were forced to relocate.<sup>18</sup>

## Ventura Doesn’t Need More Pollution

SoCalGas argues that expanding the Ventura compressor station is “essential to meeting the increased demand of the coastal system” and for increasing gas storage capacity at the Goleta Storage Field in Santa Barbara County.<sup>19</sup> But it is past time we transition away from fossil fuels.



The Goleta Gas Storage Field (top, center) lies immediately adjacent to Goleta Beach County Park (lower right).

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Cities and counties across California, including Ventura County, are prioritizing clean renewable energy and electrification through efforts like banning natural gas in new construction.<sup>20</sup> Gas-fired power plants in Ventura County are shutting down.<sup>21</sup> It is contradictory to invest in more natural gas as communities take necessary steps away from it. More infrastructure will lock Ventura in to a dirty energy future: SoCalGas’ compressor stations can operate for decades.<sup>22</sup> Rapidly worsening climate change cannot afford another 50 years of leaky gas infrastructure.

## Recommendations

Renewables like wind and solar energy are not just better for our health and environment, but they are also cheaper than fossil fuels.<sup>23</sup> Rather than locking ourselves in to catastrophic climate change and fossil fuel dependence, we must rapidly transition to 100 percent clean, renewable energy. VCAPCD and the California Public Utilities Commission must reject the SoCalGas proposal to expand the Ventura compressor station.

## Endnotes

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