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Environmental Coalition Condemns Railroad Commission's Decision to Allow Rogue Flaring and Venting at Drilling Sites and to Relax Environmental Protections

Austin, TX- Yesterday, a coalition of Texas environmental groups sent an [open letter](#) to the Texas Railroad Commission (RRC) [urging them to take action](#) to regulate gas flaring and venting that far exceeds state allowed limits. The letter also pressed the RRC to prevent waste by restricting production at oil and gas drilling sites across the state where the flaring and venting are the worst, in the Permian Basin in West Texas and the Eagle Ford Shale in the Coastal Bend. Today at its third hearing on the issue in the past month, the Texas Railroad Commission:

Today the Texas Railroad Commission:

- Refused to hear from environmental advocates on the Agenda items of concern;
- Allowed 7 gas flaring and venting waivers over public health-based standards and climate change warnings and failed to disallow future flaring and venting; and,
- Waived fees and environmental rules per Governor Abbott and President Trump's industry-friendly, people-harsh orders.

"Today's Railroad Commission hearing shows why it's time for new leadership at the RRC," said **Robin Schneider, Executive Director with Texas Campaign for the Environment**. "Instead of certainty they created chaos that will lead to job losses and cascading bankruptcies. Instead of protecting the people of Texas, they waived rules on waste clean-up, well-plugging, and oil and gas storage. Texans will all pay in water contamination and other environmental damage. They took these actions without any public comments or real discussion even though members of the public were signed up to speak. We need new leadership that's not beholden to the industry."

Failure to Take Public Input

On April 21, the RRC formed a narrow industry-led task force to study the issues on today's Agenda. However, the Commissioners would not allow resident and environmental stakeholders to speak who bring additional Texans' concerns and information - neither in the Task Force nor at today's hearing.

"As commissioners, you hold our common good in your decision-making hands," said **Isabel Araiza, Ph.D., Founding Member, For the Greater Good - Corpus Christi**. "Today, you revealed your blatant disregard for the greater good. You voted for private greed over community need. As we face increased climate crises and declines in our public health, we will remember how, with your votes, you chose to exacerbate those problems."

Health & Climate Impacts

Communities living next to the oil and gas industry sites, especially in the Permian Basin which is documented to have [the most methane pollution in the nation](#), suffer higher rates of chronic conditions

such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, and heart disease. **Residents of Balmorhea in the Permian Basin, Sue and Jim Franklin** describe the [health impacts to them from gas venting](#). Higher rates of pollution are also linked to [increased vulnerability to viruses like COVID-19](#).

"Flaring both wastes future Texans' resources and it accelerates us towards climate catastrophe," said **Sharon Wilson with Earthworks**. Wilson works with the Franklins and other people on the front lines of oil and gas drilling in Texas. "Whether you believe oil and gas will fuel us forever, or climate change means we have to ditch fossil fuels in our lifetime, every flare is a failure of the Railroad Commission to manage Texas's oil & gas."

Free Pass to Pollute

In addition to the decision to not regulate flaring, the Commission went even further by waiving pollution fees and relaxing environmental rules following the lead of first Governor Abbott and then President Trump [under cover of Covid-19](#) pandemic fears.

"By granting these permits to pollute, by waiving pollution fees and relaxing the environmental regulations, the Commissioners are giving Big Oil a green light to burn up our resources, our health and the future of our children," **said Emma Pabst, Global Warming Solutions Advocate with Environment Texas**. "The Railroad Commission needs to pull the brake on dangerous flaring and stop this runaway train from destroying our state."

Specifically, the Commission approved three resolutions that temporarily weaken regulations, enforcement and lower revenues to the State of Texas. The resolutions passed today by the Texas Railroad Commission will:

- create exceptions to Statewide Rule 78, eliminating fees and surcharges on five different types of permits over the next year, which could mean millions of lost revenues to the State of Texas that are used to hire inspectors, permit writers and even to plug wells;
- create exceptions to Statewide Rule 8, which gives industry an additional year to clean up dirty oil and gas pits, to Statewide Rule 14, which allows industry up to two years to plug inactive wells, allows some exceptions to the Commission's casing rules (Statewide Rule 13), and gives further discretion on enforcement that could lower administrative fines for lawbreakers (Statewide Rule 107);
- create a new temporary policy on Statewide Rule 95, by for the first time ever allowing oil operators to store crude oil underground in formations that are not an underground salt formation.

"Despite continued requests for action to lower pollution, the Commission decided to favor industry again and allow companies to routinely burn hundreds of thousands of pounds of pollution into the atmosphere, poisoning our air and cooking our climate," noted **Cyrus Reed, interim Director of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club**. "This is a devastating decision for our climate, community health, and economy."

NOTE: Texas Campaign for the Environment, Sierra Club, and other environmental organizations will hold a **Railroad Commission Candidates' Forum** online on the evening of **Wednesday, May 27th**. Details to be announced. For more information, contact: donna@texasenvironment.org

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