



SIERRA CLUB

LONE STAR CHAPTER

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PUC OKs Expensive, Polluting Fracked Gas Plant in Southeast Texas *Sierra Club supports scrapping hydrogen but condemns disregard for impact on Entergy customers*

Austin, TX – Despite the volatility of fracked gas already causing unaffordable consumer prices across the state, the Public Utility Commission on Thursday paved the way for yet another gas plant in Southeast Texas that will result in higher bills and higher pollution. Perhaps the most surprising part of the PUC’s actions yesterday was its vote to remove the project’s modest cost cap, which had been recommended by a judge to protect ratepayers.

PUC commissioners, appointed by recently re-elected Gov. Greg Abbott, decided on the financial aspects of the Orange County Advanced Power Station (OCAPS), which massive corporation Entergy wants to build in Bridge City. With the judge’s suggested cost cap of \$1.3 billion removed, Entergy now expects to spend nearly \$1.6 billion to build the project, though it could end up spending even more because of the PUC’s refusal to limit the final price tag. The eventual cost – including this additional \$300 million – will be passed on to ratepayers.

“This decision shows that conservative Texas officials don’t actually care about lowering prices,” **said Emma Pabst, representative for the Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal Campaign.** “If PUC commissioners really wanted to lower bills for Entergy’s customers, they would have rejected the proposal. The Inflation Reduction Act is making renewable energy even more affordable, but let’s be clear: Renewables and battery storage have been some of the cheapest forms of energy for years. They’re best for the people who pay the bills, for the people who benefit from local clean energy jobs, and for the people who live near polluting plants. The only thing renewables aren’t good for is the fossil fuel industry.”

While Entergy had wanted its OCAPS to use both fracked gas and hydrogen, PUC commissioners struck the hydrogen component. Because hydrogen is not a clean source of energy and would have resulted in even more emissions, advocates support this decision though are concerned about commissioners’ stated interest in expanding hydrogen in the future. The final step for the OCAPS project is at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, which will consider the proposal’s environmental impacts.

“The numbers show that this project is not green and it’s also uneconomical and polluting,” **said John Beard, Jr. founder and CEO of the Port Arthur Community Action Network.** “Why should we pay more so that Entergy can continue to pollute our community? Commissioners lifted the cost cap because they are worried about how inflation might impact Entergy’s ability to build this plant. But it’s everyday people, the ratepayers, who will really pay and bear the cost of it all. What about the economic and health impacts of even more pollution heaped on an overburdened Southeast Texas?”

The proposed plant would be located just miles away from multiple Bridge City schools, and Entergy’s own wind analysis shows that these students would frequently find themselves directly in the path of fossil fuel pollution. The plant would also be less than five miles from Bessie Heights Marsh, a popular location for boating and fishing. TCEQ is expected to make a decision about whether to approve Entergy’s air pollution permit in the coming months.

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