

For Immediate Release: October 11, 2022

Media Contacts:

Dylan Plummer, Senior Campaign Representative, Sierra Club

541.531.1858, dylan.plummer@sierraclub.org

Sage Welch

615.715.6714, sage@sunstonestrategies.org

Community organizations and residents protest experimental Eugene hydrogen blending pilot project

NW Natural's proposed hydrogen pilot targets an environmental justice community in West Eugene, despite health and safety risks

Eugene, Ore — Local and statewide climate, community, environmental and health organizations are petitioning the Oregon Public Utility Commission to reject a proposal by NW Natural to pipe experimental hydrogen into the gas system in Eugene, citing health, safety, cost and feasibility concerns. Residents and organizations are specifically alarmed with the siting of the project in a community that is already overburdened with pollution.

“Northwest Natural’s hydrogen blending project is an example of the fossil fuel industry’s predatory practices of putting the most vulnerable community members at risk in favor of profit.” said Teryn Yazdani the Staff Attorney and Climate Policy Manager for Beyond Toxics, who led the petition. “Forcing blended hydrogen onto residents and businesses in the Bethel community — and not allowing them to opt out — increases their health and safety risks, while also increasing their gas rates — all while doing little to reduce climate pollution. It’s all risk and no reward for Bethel residents.”

Northwest Natural [filed an application](#) in August to mix hydrogen — between 5 and 10% of total gas volume — with fossil gas that would then be piped into the gas system and delivered to homes in Eugene’s Bethel neighborhood. The petition notes that the project carries very high costs which will be footed by Northwest Natural customers, with minimal reductions in climate pollution, while increasing the health and safety concerns associated with transporting hydrogen in infrastructure and appliances built for fossil gas. Residents would not be able to opt out of the pilot.

Hydrogen is more susceptible to leakage than gas, and can be ignited [more easily](#). A recent study from the United Kingdom found that if hydrogen were used in homes to replace gas, the annual predicted [number of explosions would more than quadruple](#).

“As a physician, I’m deeply concerned about the health and safety risks associated with burning a hydrogen-methane blend in our homes — particularly for vulnerable populations and communities who already face disproportionate health burdens due to air pollution and climate change,” said Dr. Melanie Plaut, a member with Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility.

The Bethel neighborhood where the pilot would take place is a working class community where over 90% of residents are considered low-income, with a higher percentage of communities of color compared to the rest of the city. Residents live among several polluting factories and industries which accounted for [96%](#) of all toxic emissions released in the City of Eugene in 2019. Asthma rates in the Bethel School District are [almost double](#) those of other neighborhoods in Eugene.

Physicians for Social Responsibility recently [released a report](#) recommending that local governments rule out hydrogen blending projects due to a lack of long-term studies on the risks and their use to prop up continued reliance on fossil gas, which has well-documented health impacts. A recently published [review](#) of 32 independent studies found that using hydrogen for home heating is [not feasible](#) due to technical barriers, and that this use of hydrogen would be far less efficient and more expensive than electric solutions like heat pumps and district heating.

“Study after study shows that replacing gas with clean, electric appliances is the lowest-cost, lowest-risk path to cutting pollution from homes,” noted Dylan Plummer, campaign representative for the Sierra Club. *“Using hydrogen for home heating is not only risky and astronomically costly - it’s unnecessary. It wastes a resource we should use for hard to decarbonize sectors. Piping hydrogen into homes for heating is a terrible idea that no utility that’s serious about decarbonization should be proposing.”*

Advocates say gas utilities are using the guise of hydrogen blending to extend the life of the gas system and fight electrification, at a major cost to consumers. All NW Natural customers would be charged a .2% increase in their gas bills to cover the costs of this pilot, which comes in addition to a proposed [42% increase](#) in gas utility bills this Winter.

“The Bethel community has a long history of bearing the brunt of corporate greed at the expense of public health, safety, and livability. The fact is — the community cannot afford to cover the costs of this pilot - nor can they afford to be a test case for a carbon-reduction strategy that is bound to fail,” concluded Yazdani.

The intervening organizations include Beyond Toxics, NAACP Eugene-Springfield, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, 350 Eugene and Sierra Club, and are represented by attorneys Jan Hasselman at Earthjustice and Carra Sahler at the Green Energy Institute.

###

About Beyond Toxics

Beyond Toxics is a statewide environmental justice organization advancing policies that ensure meaningful participation and cultivating grassroots leadership from Oregon’s frontline and impacted communities. Established in 2001, we are a multicultural, inter-generational team dedicated to centering community leaders and building out the true diversity of our state’s vibrant Environmental Justice movement.