

California Court Rules Lawsuit Against State Oil Regulator. Thousands of Wells Didn't Get Proper Environmental Reviews, Suit Says

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

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*A judge has ruled decisively in favor of the **Center for Biological Diversity's** ability to proceed with a suit over California's oil and gas regulator committing widespread violations of environmental laws. The regulator and an oil-industry lobbying group had tried to dismiss the Center's case, but on Wednesday the court [rejected](#) their arguments.*

"The court saw right through these ridiculous delay tactics," said Hollin Kretzmann, an attorney at the [Center's Climate Law Institute](#). "It's time for Gov. Newsom and his regulators to face the music for greenlighting oil industry pollution. Rubberstamping thousands of oil and gas permits is illegal and dangerous to communities and the environment, and it needs to stop."

The [lawsuit](#), filed in February 2021, alleges that the California Geologic Energy Management Division, or CalGEM, has ignored its legal obligation to analyze environmental and health harms before issuing permits and approvals for oil and gas projects across the state. In 2020 alone regulators approved nearly 2,000 permits for new oil and gas wells without proper environmental review.

Under the California Environmental Quality Act — the state's bedrock environmental protection and community right-to-know law — state and local agencies are required to disclose, analyze and mitigate a project's environmental harms before approving oil and gas permits. But for years CalGEM has granted approvals for new oil and gas activity without conducting any such studies. As a result, regulators have approved thousands of permits that haven't been reviewed for health and environmental risks.

"We applaud the court's decision. CalGEM cannot continue to evade its responsibilities to protect Californians," said Shaleen Shanbhag, partner at Hadsell, Stormer, Renick & Dai LLP, which represents the Center in the case. "Our goal is to stop the agency's blatant disregard of the state's most fundamental environmental laws."

The case will proceed to discovery, where CalGEM and Western States Petroleum Association must turn over documents related to the case.

The Center is also represented in the case by Earthrights International, Stanford Environmental Law Clinic and Schonbrun, Seplow, Harris, Hoffman & Zeldes LLP.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of

endangered species and wild places.

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