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Rally at Environmental Protection Agency hearing shows no need for SDG&E's dirty power plant

January 8, 2014 (Otay)--On December 17, local community organizations and residents from around the county rallied to ask the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to deny a permit for SDG&E's proposed fossil fuel power plant, Pio Pico, in San Diego. The hearing ironically falls on the 50th anniversary of the Clean Air Act, a federal law requiring the EPA to develop and enforce regulations that protect citizens from breathing hazardous and harmful air.

Ahead of providing testimony at the hearing, local groups including [Environmental Health Coalition](#), [SanDiego350.org](#) and [Sierra Club](#) organized a rally packed with more than 50 community members sporting signs, chants, speakers and a one-of-a-kind "SDG&E Giveaway Game Show" that highlighted the exorbitant cost that SDG&E customers are bearing from the utility's infrastructure failures as well as new excessive infrastructure, including \$1.6-billion for Pio Pico. Speakers at the rally, including local and regional residents and solar industry representatives, also stressed that the pollution impacts of the proposed power plant would harm environmental health, climate and goals for clean energy.

After the rally, community members voiced their concern directly to the Environmental Protection Agency, which will soon decide to approve or deny a permit for the construction of Pio Pico. The Agency previously approved a permit but, after receiving appeals, is now reconsidering standards for particulate matter—a pollutant that can increase the number and severity of asthma attacks, and cause or aggravate bronchitis and other lung diseases.

"We have so much opportunity for clean, cost-effective energy resources like solar and energy storage," says Nicola Peill-Moelter of SanDiego350.org. "We shouldn't be moving backwards by wasting money on a polluting power plant that's expensive, entirely unnecessary, and damaging to our public and environmental health."

According to the environmental groups, if the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grants the permit for Pio Pico:

- Chronic respiratory illnesses, including asthma, may increase in surrounding communities with more air pollution.
- SDG&E customers will owe \$1.6 billion, to be paid through increased energy bills.
- Each year, the power plant will release air pollutants and greenhouse gases equivalent to the greenhouse gases produced by 129,584 gasoline-powered cars or burning 70 million gallons of

gasoline.

- Climate change impacts will continue in San Diego, including an acceleration of wild fires, sea level rise, drought and heat waves.

SDG&E has pushed for approval of the Pio Pico facility in Otay, a largely industrial area, following the CPUC's decision to shelve the proposed Quail Brush gas-fired power plant near Mission Trails Regional Park. Quail Brush drew heavy opposition from community leaders and residents in both Santee and San Diego due to its proximity to Mission Trails as well as schools and residents, and concerns over fire danger.

But Otay Mesa, an area where more than 80 percent of the population is people of color, is already heavily burdened with toxic pollution from an existing power plant and heavy truck traffic, currently ranking in the worst 20 percent of zip codes most burdened by cumulative environmental impacts in California. The region already fails to meet state standards for particulate matter—a primary cause of respiratory illnesses and asthma. Local environmental groups say the implementation of Pio Pico would be detrimental to the area's environmental health, threatening any hopes of a clean energy future or improved energy rates.

"This area has been a pollution dumping ground for decades and the health and quality of life of our community suffers because of it," says Luz Palomino, San Ysidro resident. "We don't want another expensive, polluting power plant; we want clean air and energy built in our neighborhoods."

The local organizations and San Diego County residents delivered the same message to the EPA – San Diego's energy future should not be at the expense of our communities and there is a better, cleaner, cheaper way. The Agency is expected to make a decision on the permit in early 2014.

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