

# NW Natural Withdraws Application for Controversial Hydrogen Blending Experiment following Community Uproar

Intervening Organizations Celebrate Withdrawal Of “Wasteful, Unnecessary” Project

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Eugene, OR – Citing community concerns, NW Natural has withdrawn its application to build an experimental hydrogen blending project in West Eugene. The withdrawal comes after a coalition of environmental and social justice organizations **intervened** to block the project due to unanswered health and safety questions, and opposition to the \$10 million price tag, which would have been borne by ratepayers for an experimental approach that independent studies show is not a viable decarbonization strategy.

“This should be a lesson, not just for NW Natural but for all toxic polluters – the West Eugene community is not a sacrifice zone,” **said Lisa Arkin, Executive Director of Beyond Toxics.** “Eugene residents will not be forced to be guinea pigs for experimental and dangerous technology that perpetrates fossil fuel infrastructure, environmental injustices, and more air toxics. This project was absolutely unacceptable, and its withdrawal is a testament to the power of community opposition.”

The experimental pilot project proposed by NW Natural would have mixed hydrogen gas into the fossil gas that is delivered to homes in Eugene’s Bethel neighborhood – a working class community where over 66 percent of residents are considered low-income, and with a higher percentage of communities of color compared to the rest of the city. In their petition opposing the project, environmental and social justice groups expressed concern over the siting of the project in a community that is already disproportionately burdened by air pollution. Burning hydrogen generates nitrogen oxide pollution, a lung damaging pollutant that contributes to the formation of ozone.

 Factories and industries in West Eugene are responsible for 96 percent of all toxic emissions released in the city of Eugene, and asthma rates in the Bethel School District are almost double those of other neighborhoods in Eugene. NW Natural’s hydrogen pilot project could have increased exposure to dangerous air pollutants in the Bethel neighborhood – and concerningly, residents would not have been able to opt out of the project.



“The law requires real decarbonization, not phony solutions that justify continued reliance on fossil fuels,” **said Jan Hasselman of Earthjustice, who along with Carra Sahler of the Green Energy Institute, represented the organizations in the Oregon Public Commission proceeding.** “There may well be some role for hydrogen in a decarbonized future, but that role will not be pumping it into people’s homes to burn in stoves and hot water heaters.”

In addition to air pollution concerns, environmental and social justice groups also cited research showing piping hydrogen into homes can increase the risk of explosion. Hydrogen is more susceptible to leakage than gas, and can be ignited more easily. A 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.

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 have been charged a .2 percent increase in their gas bills to cover the costs of this pilot, which would be in addition to the approved 42 percent increase in gas utility bills for NW Natural customers in just over a year.

“As our community transitions off of polluting fossil fuels, we don’t have time for dangerous distractions like NW Natural’s experimental hydrogen blending project,” **said Dylan Plummer, Senior Campaign Representative with the Sierra Club.** “We must invest in solutions that are safe and cost effective like heat pumps, which provide real benefits to Eugene residents.”

NW Natural has indicated that it plans to conduct additional stakeholder outreach before deciding whether to re-submit its application. The intervening organizations look forward to engaging in this dialogue to help ensure hydrogen projects are not forced on communities as a false climate solution, but focused on the greatest opportunities for green hydrogen to safely produce real decarbonization, such as heavy industry.

The intervening organizations included Beyond Toxics, NAACP Eugene-Springfield, Springfield Eugene Tenant Association, 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.

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