



**Adapted from [La Opinión](#): Protecting Latinos from Oil and Gas Pollution: Calling on States**

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It's a perilous time for our nation's health and environmental protections – but Californians have a reason to cheer.

Last month, California took a major step forward by adopting a set of regulations that will reduce harmful air pollution from oil and gas facilities – a move that will be particularly beneficial for Latino communities.

But why do these rules matter and how can oil and gas pollution disproportionately impact Latino communities?

**Unequal Health Impacts**

Oil and gas operations release methane, a strong greenhouse gas that is responsible for about a quarter of the earth's warming, which increases extreme weather events such as floods and drought. Extreme weather events have an especially negative impact on low-income Latino populations because they amplify existing vulnerabilities such as poverty and poor air quality, which are prevalent in many Latino communities.

Latinos are heavily represented in crop and livestock production and construction, where they're at elevated risk from climate-change-boosted extreme heat, making Latinos three times more likely to die on the job from excessive heat than non-Latinos. Flooding and severe droughts are expected to hit regions in the state that are heavily populated by Latinos the hardest, including the San Joaquin Valley and the Southern California region. Nationally, Latino communities are also particularly hard-hit by climate change, according to an NRDC report published last year.

Aside from its climate impacts, exposure to oil and gas air pollution is linked to a host of serious health impacts, especially for those communities living closest to development. Oil and gas facilities also release harmful pollutants like benzene, a known carcinogen and other compounds that can aggravate asthma and cause lung diseases.

Impacted communities near oil and gas facilities, like the residents of University Park – a south Los Angeles community made up of mostly low-income, Spanish-speaking residents – who endured a 400% spike in oil production in their community, report experiencing severe headaches, nausea, and nose-bleeds. These and other related impacts often correlate with a higher number of days missed from school and work, lower educational attainment and income potential, and weakened health overall.

### **Millions of Latinos Live Close to the Threat**

In California, Latinos are often the most affected by oil and gas pollution. Over a million Californians live within a half mile from an active oil and gas facility, and of those million, over 500,000 are of Hispanic origin. Latinos make up 45% of the state's population living in the smoggiest regions of the state, and, nationwide, Latino children are more likely to have asthma, and those with asthma are twice as likely to die from an asthma attack, than non-Latinos.

California's new protections that require oil and gas companies to routinely inspect equipment methane leaks are the strongest in the country and are expected improve the air quality, protect the climate and improve public health.

### **States must act where Trump backtracks**

While the rules are a crucial step toward protecting the health and safety of communities, *more needs to be done* elsewhere to protect *all* Latinos.

Aside from California, a majority of Latinos live in Texas, Florida and New York, states that are also among the most affected by extreme heat, air pollution, and flooding, making climate warming impacts a national problem for Latino communities.

And in a time when the federal government is taking steps backwards in policies that protect the health of people, it is clear that in order for Latinos in states outside of California to be protected from harmful oil and gas pollution, other jurisdictions must follow California's lead.

National polls show that a vast majority of Latinos in the U.S. care deeply about climate change and air quality. If we are to ensure a thriving future for the next generations of Latino children, we must start to mobilize now – to stand up and call on our elected officials in other states to take action. If the federal government won't protect us, states must step up and use their authority to protect its people against a major source of pollution.