

Environmental Justice Issues and Carbon Sequestration

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The Problem

In order to reduce fossil fuel emissions, we need to fundamentally change the ways in which we use and produce energy.

Fossil Fuels Impacts

- Fossil fuel's environmental footprint does not just impact the climate, it has been having an adverse impact on public health and the environment for decades in California.
- This impact can occur disproportionately in poor, minority communities in ways which affect their well-being (health, economic status, sense of justice).

Examples of Disproportionate Impact: Now and Then

- Some examples:
 - Sentinel and Avenal Power Plants (being permitted)
 - Sun Valley Peaker Plant (permitted)
 - Chevron Refinery in Richmond (old)
 - Refineries in Wilmington (old)

California's Energy Future

- What would a rational future look like for California's energy needs?
- Would it rely on fossil fuel even if climate were not an issue?
- What would be the steps that California would take now to embrace a new energy future that was not predominantly based on the use of fossil fuel?

California's Intellectual and Political Endowment on Energy

- California has the most aggressive RPS in the country, efforts to establish RPSs at the national and state level are not always in keeping with sustainability goals.
- California has the intellectual endowment to pull new technology through the “knothole”. This would be a gift to the entire globe’s future and help to re-establish intergenerational equity.

What role does carbon sequestration play in this new energy future?

- Designed to “keep the wheels on the fossil fuel future” which runs counter to our need to clean the air.
- By all accounts, carbon sequestration is extremely expensive from an energy standpoint, needing an additional third of the energy from the powerplant to compress the gases.
- That would mean adding an additional 10-20,000 megawatts to our energy portfolio or 15-30 new powerplants each producing 500 megawatts.

Impacts to local communities

- Potential contamination to groundwater from co-pollutants sequestered.
- Potential for a bolus release of carbon dioxide during a well failure, similar to the current failure of a deep well in the Gulf. Impacts of such a release on local communities would be catastrophic since carbon dioxide displaces air.
- The potential for that type of release is a burden put on top of the stack releases of other pollutants from fossil fuel use.

Global Liability Issues

- The liability from a catastrophic release has yet to be determined, as the construction of international law has yet to catch up with pollutants escaping international boundaries.
- The impacts from a catastrophic release will also have the potential to create a disproportionate impact on environmental justice communities since the impacts of climate change are already having such an impact, i.e. Katrina, food shortages in Africa, and the effects of rising prices for food and energy on the poor.

Conclusion

- Environmental justice communities understand that they will benefit from a clean energy future that does not include fossil fuels. Those benefits are many and include cleaner air, cleaner water, and job creation in their communities if power is locally sourced in the new clean energy economy.
- The fossil fuel footprint has a chain of impacts on environmental justice communities which is disproportionately borne. The tenants of justice compel that scale to be balanced. Carbon sequestration is not a part of that return to balance.